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THE TRUANTS

A Comedy in Three Acts.

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BY

WILFRED T. COLEBY

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THE TRUANTS

A COMEDY IN THREE ACTS

By

WILFRED T. COLEBY

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THE TRUANTS

A COMEDY IN THREE ACTS

Produced by Miss Lena Ashwell at the Kingsway Theatre, London, on February 11, 1907, with the following cast :—

Freda Savell . . .	*Miss Lena Ashwell.*
Bill Chetwood . . .	*Mr. Dennis Eadie.*
Dick Chetwood . . .	*Mr. C. M. Hallard.*
Lady Darnaway . . .	*Miss Frances Ivor.*
Pamela Grey	*Miss Athene Seyler.*
Lord Strelland . . .	*Mr. Norman McKinnell.*
The Rev. Philip Preston .	*Mr. Ernest Young.*
Bent	*Miss Margaret Murray.*
Checkley	*Mr. D. Lemman Ward.*
Mrs. Collins	*Miss Gertrude Scott.*
Jack Carstairs . . .	*Miss Olive Walter.*
Pegler	*Mr. D. Fagan.*

Parish Councillors, Members of the Nethercote Household.

The events recorded in the play take place within the space of 24 hours.

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THE TRUANTS

ACT I

The scene is the Hall at Nethercote Grange, the Chetwoods' place in Kent. The Hall is an old-fashioned, oak-panelled room. The pictures and furniture are of the usual country house type. It is early in the afternoon in October. A scene plot will be found at the end of the play.

As the scene opens half-a-dozen people are sitting at the table—i.e. DICK CHETWOOD, *a handsome, charming-looking man of* 35, *at the end of the table near the fireplace. Next to him is* LORD STRELLAND, *a clean-shaven, thin-faced, aristocratic-looking man with rather a disagreeable expression. On the other side, with his back to the spectators, sits* PRESTON, *a typical country clergyman of middle-age* (*a thorough gentleman*). MRS. COLLINS *is sitting next to* LORD STRELLAND. *She is a woman of* 30 ; *she is rather smartly turned out in a dark country coat and skirt. She is very alert, and when she sits down, perches rather than sits. Her way of noticing everything reminds one of a jackdaw. Sitting in chairs against the wall in separate attitudes of discomfort are three or four other men, i.e. the village grocer—who keeps the post-office, the village carpenter—the man who jobs the village trap—and the publican.*

(*As the curtain goes up* DICK CHETWOOD *rises at the head of the table and addresses the company.*)

DICK (*after whispering a moment to* STRELLAND, *getting up with some papers in his hand*). Well, gentlemen (*turning to* MRS. COLLINS)—I beg your

pardon, Mrs. Collins—ladies and gentlemen. That is all. It only remains for us, as the Parish Council, to answer the letter. The Water Company are willing to bring the water to the village here for £120 a year.

(BENT, *a middle-aged parlour-maid, comes in, followed by a jolly, round-faced man, evidently a yeoman.*)

BENT. Mr. Checkley.

DICK (*coming forward*). How are you, Mr. Checkley? You're all behind the fair—we've just finished. The meeting was called at 2.30, it's past 3.

CHECKLEY. Well there, Mr. Chetwood, sir, t'warn't my fault as I'm late. I says to my wife this arternoon, "Where's Parish Council Meetin'?" I says. "Why," she says, "down at the schools."

LORD STRELLAND. Never mind, Checkley, you're just in time to hear what Mr. Chetwood's got to say.

DICK (*standing up again and glancing at the papers in his hand*). We can have the water laid on for £120 a year. I'm willing to pay three-quarters of that provided I get it at the Grange here. Lord Strelland will have it laid on to his two farms. (*Turning to* STRELLAND.) Eh, Strelland?

STRELLAND. Certainly.

DICK. That will be another ten pounds, so that the village will get an absolutely unlimited supply of the best water in the county for about £30 a year. It only remains for us as the Parish Council to pass a formal resolution.

STRELLAND (*getting up*). Then I propose that the Nethercote Parish Council accept the company's terms.

DICK (*to the clergyman*). Will you second that, Preston?

PRESTON. Certainly. (*Getting up.*) I second that.

DICK. Those in favour of the motion hold up their hands.

(DICK CHETWOOD, STRELLAND, MRS. COLLINS *and* PRESTON *hold up their hands, but none of the others do.*)

(*Looking round bewildered—after a pause.*) Those against it ?

(*All the others hold up their hands.*)

DICK (*utterly befogged*). But—really—surely there must be some mistake. The way we suffer from shortage of water in this village is terrible, the money won't amount to a halfpenny vote. At last we've the chance of getting what we've been struggling for for years, and you people, you'll get it, you know, for nothing.

(*Another pause.*)

A PARISH COUNCILLOR (*rising slowly and speaking stolidly*). The matter 'as *not* bin thrashed out, Mr. Chetwood, sir.

DICK (*hopelessly*). Very well, the motion's lost—that's all.

STRELLAND (*breaking in*). Yes, yes, we'll call another meeting later on.

(STRELLAND *gets up and comes up to* DICK, *the others get up one after the other. There is some whispering.*)

CHECKLEY (*getting up*). I 'ope as there's no 'on-pleasantness, Mr. Chetwood, indeed I do, sir.

DICK (*smiling*). Unpleasantness ! Of course not.

CHECKLEY. Because before this Parish Council Meetin' breaks up, there's summat I should like to say, and that is, as we all of us hoffers our 'eartiest congratulations and respects to Mr. Chetwood 'ere, Mr. Dick we allus calls 'im and shall call 'im, on 'is engagement to Miss Savell. We none of us knows Miss Savell as yet, except 'avin' seen 'er about, but we *shall* know 'er, and I may say as we shall all of us

be glad to know Miss Savell, Mrs. Chetwood as is to be, and proud to know 'er.

THE REST. 'Ear, 'ear!

DICK (*smiling*). Thank you very much. You've rather hurried me along, Mr. Checkley. I didn't mean to make it public for a day or two, but I shall send the announcement to the papers to-night.

MRS. COLLINS (*coming forward and gushing profusely*). My *dear* Mr. Chetwood, I'd *no* idea. I *do* congratulate you.

PRESTON. My heartiest congratulations, Chetwood. (*In an undertone to* MRS. COLLINS.) What's the name?

MRS. COLLINS. Savell—Savell.

STRELLAND. Every happiness, my dear fellow. I'd no notion of this.

DICK. Thanks very much. (*To the others.*) Well, gentlemen, it's very good of you to come up here and save us that walk down to the schools. You'd like some tea, Mrs. Collins, wouldn't you? The men-servants are all out at this football match (*ringing the bell*), but Bent will bring you some in a moment. (*To the others.*) Now, my friends, you must come and drink Miss Savell's health in something a little stronger than tea, eh?

ALL. Thank 'ee, sir.

(*They troop out with* DICK CHETWOOD, CHECKLEY *goes out last.*)

STRELLAND (*just as* CHECKLEY *is going out*). Checkley.

(CHECKLEY *comes back.*)

STRELLAND. Checkley, what on earth's the matter? Why won't you have the water? We had twenty cases of diphtheria in the village last summer, as you know. It can't be the money.

CHECKLEY (*clearing his throat*). Well, milord, 'tis like this 'ere. Some of the cottages 'as got wells, 'aven't 'um?

STRELLAND. Only six out of the whole village.

CHECKLEY. Ah, but that's it, milord, six wells and four of 'em belongs to us as is on the Parish Council, a matter of four between us, you see. Now, if we 'as the company's water our wells becomes as nothing, don't 'em? All the money as was spent in sinkin' our wells is throwed away.

STRELLAND. But the wells are more than a hundred years old, and the water in 'em's not fit to drink.

CHECKLEY. I do know that, milord, but the wells increases the valley of our property, don't 'em? It was Jacob's well as made Jacob the man 'e was, I do reckon. Now if we 'as the company's water, where be our wells? We shan't be able to 'old our 'eads no 'igher than them in the village as 'as *not* got wells, shall us?

STRELLAND. I see, I see.

CHECKLEY. No offence, milord, but you see 'ow it stands, don't 'e.

(BENT *brings in tea for* MRS. COLLINS. CHECKLEY *goes out.*)

STRELLAND. Good heavens! (*Turning to* PRESTON.) Well, Preston, how did you enjoy your trip round the world?

(BENT *clears chairs.*)

PRESTON. Immensely. You've been away too, I hear.

STRELLAND. Yes—I came back yesterday. I've been across Afghanistan and up into Tibet.

(DICK CHETWOOD *comes back hurriedly.*)

DICK (*hurriedly to* STRELLAND). There's one thing, Strelland, before you go—about this Braxton property.

STRELLAND. You're not going to sell it, I hear.

DICK. I'd never the faintest intention of doing so. I can't think how the report got about. Now, does it matter to you when you give up the tenancy?

STRELLAND. Not in the least, Chetwood. I'll give it up to-morrow if you like.

DICK. It's very good of you indeed. You know Bill's come home?

STRELLAND. Your brother?—yes, I heard so.

DICK. He's set his heart on living at Braxton, and I want to make it over to him lock, stock and barrel, as soon as I can.

STRELLAND (*laughing*). It's uncommonly generous of you these hard times.

DICK. Well, Bill's a rum fellow. He doesn't generally bother about anything in the old country, but he's mad about Braxton. It's been the one wish of his life ever since he was a child to have the place, and I don't want to stand in his way.

STRELLAND. It's the stables, I suppose.

DICK. Yes, the stables and the down and everything. Bill's idea has always been that as soon as he made enough money he'd settle at Braxton and do a bit of training and, in fact, make the place what it was in the old days. One of our earliest recollections was seeing my grandfather's string of horses sold by auction at Braxton. Bill couldn't have been more than eight, but I can see him now sitting on the gate—howling and then muttering between his teeth, "I'll come back here, I'll fill those stables when I'm grown up, see if I don't." And, by George, he's made the money to do it.

STRELLAND. Well, I'll clear out any time. I only took it for the shooting. I never use it except to put people up when I've got a big shoot.

DICK. I can't thank you enough—and there's just one other thing, Strelland, with regard to this water, I thought——

(CHETWOOD *and* STRELLAND *walk to the back of the room where they discuss some papers.*)

MRS. COLLINS (*squirming up to* PRESTON). But it *was* so *clever* of you to write those letters to the local

paper, Mr. Preston, when you were away, and as I say to every one, how *nice* for *us* to have a clergyman at Nethercote who's *been* somewhere and knows something of the *world* and keeps his *eyes* open.

DICK (*coming down rapidly—to* STRELLAND). Very well, Monday week then. Preston, one minute.

(CHETWOOD *and* PRESTON *go out, talking and looking at some papers.*)

STRELLAND (*coming down, to* MRS. COLLINS). Preston's looking very fit.

MRS. COLLINS. Yes. (*Simpering and squirming.*) And how odd it seems to have our clergyman in the parish again, doesn't it, Lord Strelland—quite *strange*—as I was saying to your wife yesterday. I do hope some of the poor old people will make haste and die while Mr. Preston *is* here. Not that I want any one to die, of course, but it does seem so dreadful to think of them all dying off as they did last summer without any clergyman at all to minister to them, or even give them their soup.

STRELLAND. Preston ought to have a curate, of course.

MRS. COLLINS. Well, between ourselves, the poor good man never *is* here, is he? never! (*Taking a pocket-book out of her pocket.*) Now I've kept a little memorandum of the actual number of Sundays he's—

(BENT *comes in, followed by* PRESTON. *She gives* PRESTON *his umbrella.*)

STRELLAND (*to* BENT). Is Miss Savell in, Bent?

BENT. I think she's out walking with Master Jack, milord.

STRELLAND. Could you give her a message from me?

BENT. Certainly, milord.

STRELLAND. Tell her, would you, that I only came back from abroad yesterday, that I wish to see her

very particularly, and I'll walk across again this evening.

BENT. Very well, milord.

MRS. COLLINS (*to* STRELLAND). But weren't you astonished at the engagement, Lord Strelland, though I daresay you'd heard. Of course, you know Miss Savell so *very* well.

STRELLAND (*curtly*). Only in business.

MRS. COLLINS. In business—oh yes, of course.

STRELLAND (*turning to* PRESTON). She's guardian in a sort of way to my little nephew Jack. (*To* MRS. COLLINS.) Good-bye, good-bye, Preston, you're lookin' as brown as a berry.

(STRELLAND *goes out.*)

PRESTON. I'm sure I'm very stupid, Mrs. Collins, but who on earth is Miss Savell. Ought I to know?

MRS. COLLINS (*launching well out into her stride*). Don't you know *really!* But, of course, you're away so *very* much, aren't you? It's all quite *too* romantic. Miss Savell is the girl who was shut up in that fort all those months amongst the Afridis with Lord Strelland's sister, poor Ethel Carstairs and her husband.

PRESTON. Shut up where?

MRS. COLLINS. Don't you remember about poor Ethel Carstairs—how she and her husband and a handful of native troops got cut off in that sudden rising amongst the hill tribes in Afghanistan? They were besieged for months—and the poor Carstairs' baby was born in the middle of the fighting while Ethel was shut up in the fort, without a doctor or anything? Well, it was this Miss Savell who was with them. Freda Savell, and poor Ethel and her husband were the only Europeans in the fort, and when Ethel and her husband were killed, just at the last moment Freda Savell managed to escape somehow with Ethel's baby—little Jack, you know, who's stopping here now. Don't you remember the tremen-

dous talk there was about it? Nine years ago it was —Freda Savell was only seventeen at the time.

PRESTON. I'd forgotten. (*Crosses to fireplace.*)

MRS. COLLINS. I think you were travelling at the time.

PRESTON. Yes, I was in Bermuda that year, and Chetwood's going to marry this identical Miss Savell, is he? How interesting.

MRS. COLLINS. It's *enthralling*. And the amusing thing is I don't *think* from Lord Strelland's manner he's very pleased. You see, poor Ethel, Lord Strelland's sister, left letters saying she wanted Freda Savell to be the boy's guardian in a sort of unofficial way, and now Lord Strelland has made the child heir to his property, he doesn't at *all* approve of Miss Savell's influence. So this engagement will *quite* complicate matters I'm afraid.

PRESTON. How on earth do you find all these things out, Mrs. Collins?

MRS. COLLINS. Of course, I don't *know*, but—well —I put two and two together, you see—and——

PRESTON. Ah, this putting two and two together——

MRS. COLLINS. Well, we can't *all* be travelling always, Mr. Preston, and in the country if we didn't have *some* hobby. Of course, I don't *know* that Miss Savell and Lord Strelland may not be on the best of terms, but Freda Savell's rather advanced—and——

PRESTON. Is she the Miss Savell who wrote a book some time ago?

MRS. COLLINS. Yes, yes—*Old Beliefs and the New Age*, it was called.

PRESTON. Rather bitter in tone it was, but very well reviewed if I remember.

MRS. COLLINS. Oh, but *one* of the papers—the *Methodist Recorder*, I think it was—said the book was terribly destructive. I cut the criticism out and kept it. Lady Strelland and I were looking at it yesterday; they spoke of the book in the *gravest*

way. And then Miss Savell's *devoted* to little Jack and she's *rather* managing, and I don't *think* Lord Strelland's the sort of man to stand much interference.

PRESTON. But Strelland's brother's boy Ponty will come into the title, won't he?

MRS. COLLINS. Yes, but *not* the property. Lord Strelland hates his brother and his brother's children. He's going to leave everything to this other nephew of his, poor Ethel's boy—little Jack Carstairs; that I *do* know—nothing's entailed, and of course now Freda Savell's going to marry Dick Chetwood, the Strellands' next door neighbour—well, Lord Strelland will have to see a good deal of them. And you see, she's not *quite* one of *us*, is she? She's travelled all over the world for years by herself on quite a small income and done all kinds of things—in fact, nobody quite knows what she *has* done.

PRESTON. She's a lucky young woman anyhow, to get a man like Dick Chetwood.

MRS. COLLINS. Yes—of course, there *are* certain drawbacks.

PRESTON. Eh?

MRS. COLLINS. Well, there's Lady Darnaway to begin with, she's been mistress of the house here for ten years, you know, and as Dick Chetwood's only remaining aunt, his father's favourite sister, you may depend upon it that she——

PRESTON. My dear Mrs. Collins, Lady Darnaway is the kindest soul on earth; I'm quite certain *she* won't make any difficulty.

MRS. COLLINS. Perhaps not, but Bill Chetwood will still live on here at the Grange, I suppose?

PRESTON. Bill? Is Bill Chetwood back from Buenos Ayres? I'd no idea of it.

MRS. COLLINS. Ah, but then you *are* away so very much, aren't you? Oh dear, yes, Bill's back, and, my dear Mr. Preston, he's appalling.

PRESTON. Ah, there's a good deal of jealousy among hunting people, I'm afraid, Mrs. Collins. Be-

fore Bill went abroad he always used to stay with his uncle in the 'Shires for the hunting season, and he got the reputation of being one of the best men to hounds in the Midlands. He doesn't think much of the sport about here I expect, and he probably tells them so. But Bill Chetwood's a rare good fellow. A bit irresponsible, but I've known him ever since he was so high, and he's a fine fellow, Mrs. Collins.

MRS. COLLINS. Oh, but Mr. Preston, that's just what I say. I always stick up for Bill. What I always say is that for all Mr. Bill Chetwood's horrible ways he—

LADY DARNAWAY *comes in.* (*She is a comfortable-looking old body with a pleasant manner. She is followed by* PAMELA GREY. PAMELA *is an exquisite creature of twenty-one in a very simple and very expensive "jeune fille" frock.*)

MRS. COLLINS. Ah, how *do* you do, my *dear* Lady Darnaway, and *what* news—*what* a delightful engagement.

LADY DARNAWAY. Yes, we're all so pleased. Pamela, here's Mrs. Collins.

MRS. COLLINS. How do you do, my dear. How pretty you look!

LADY DARNAWAY. I'm so sorry I wasn't here to give you some tea.

MRS. COLLINS. Oh, but I've had the most *delicious* tea, thank you. Well, I must be off. I shall have several visits to make after this news.

PRESTON. Yes, and I must be going. Well, how's the entertainment going to come off to-morrow, Miss Pamela?

MRS. COLLINS. I hear you're going to dance, Pamela—a classical dance—how *charming!* (*To* LADY DARNAWAY.) Well, good-bye, my dear, good-bye again. No, no, no—don't come out—please don't.

(LADY DARNAWAY, PRESTON *and* MRS. COLLINS *go out amidst a volume of inanities from* MRS. COLLINS.)

(BENT *comes in to clear away the tea.*)

PAMELA. Was that Mr. Bill who rode into the stables just now, Bent?

BENT. Yes, miss.

PAMELA. Who was with him?

BENT. No one, miss.

PAMELA. I thought I heard two horses.

BENT. He was leading his horse, miss.

(LADY DARNAWAY *comes back.*)

PAMELA (*starting forward*). Queenie?

BENT. Yes, miss. (*Exit.*)

PAMELA. He's let her down. I'll bet you he's had a spill—Aunt See——

LADY DARNAWAY. Now, Pam, you are *not* to run across to the stables in those thin shoes, you've only just got rid of your cold.

(PAMELA *not taking the slightest notice, goes to the door.*)

LADY DARNAWAY (*shouting*). *Pam*, do you hear me? (*Stamping her foot.*) *Pam!*

PAMELA (*coming back*). I wish you wouldn't shout so, Aunt See. (*Pouting.*) Everybody orders me about.

LADY DARNAWAY. But you never take the faintest notice of what any one says, my dear, unless we shout at the top of our voices. Dick was complaining of you this morning.

PAMELA. Dick, indeed! Why should I listen to Dick if I've got to obey all my second cousins twice removed.

LADY DARNAWAY. Once removed, my dear. Dick is your second cousin *once* removed.

PAMELA (*at the window*). Here's that awful Mrs. Collins coming back again. (*Jumping down from the window and picking up* MRS. COLLINS' *basket which she has left on the table.*) It's her bag, I suppose.

LADY DARNAWAY (*taking the basket*). I will *not* have you going to the door, Pam.

(BILL *comes in, meeting* LADY DARNAWAY *just as she is going out.*)

LADY DARNAWAY. Is the mare hurt, Bill?

BILL. Yes.

(LADY DARNAWAY *goes out.*)

(BILL *and* PAMELA *alone.*)

PAMELA (*coming up to him*). I *say!* you've had a tumble—what's happened?

BILL (*turns*). What's happened — wire — that's what's happened.

(PAMELA *goes to the door.*)

Here, where are you goin'?

PAMELA. Just to have a look at Queenie, I shan't be a minute.

(*She goes out.*)

BILL (*shouting angrily*). Pam—come back—Pam, d'you hear me?

(PAMELA *comes back.*)

BILL (*fiercely*). Nobody's to disturb 'er, now d'you hear what I say?

PAMELA. All right. You needn't be in such a temper about it.

BILL. That's likely to put me in a better temper, I suppose—talkin' like that. (*Sulkily.*) You know I can't bear to see 'em suffer.

PAMELA (*after a brief pause, looking at him*). I never can understand you, Bill. I believe you'd sooner see a dozen human beings strung up one after the other, than an animal in pain.

BILL. Come 'ere, girlie. (*Grasps her arms, etc.*)

(PAMELA *comes to him.*)

PAMELA (*anxiously, looking at his wrist which is bound up with his handkerchief*). Bill, what have you done to your wrist?

BILL. Never mind that. The mare's hurt, I couldn't help it. You can never see this infernal wire till it's too late. But I'm in a vile temper and don't you say anythin' to make it worse.

PAMELA (*with an irritating smile*). Bill, shall I tell you something?

BILL. No.

PAMELA. I love to see you in a temper.

(LADY DARNAWAY *comes back, followed by* BENT).

Let me look at your wrist.

BILL (*putting his hands behind his back*). You'll see me in a temper once too often, one of these days.

LADY DARNAWAY. Are you hurt, Bill?

BILL. Hurt—no—the mare is though. (*Goes to sideboard.*) Bent, get my boot-jack and slippers.

LADY DARNAWAY. Bill, I will not have the place turned into a pig-stye. You've no business to come into the room at all in that filthy state.

BILL (*helping himself to a whisky and soda—savagely*). Haven't I? (*Turning round.*) Look sharp, Bent. (*Throwing himself in o a chair and swigging off his whisky and soda at a gulp.*) Huntin's a fair rotten sport in this rotten old county, nowadays.

LADY DARNAWAY. You were dilating on its merits last night and saying how it brought all the countryside together.

BILL (*with the same savage intensity*). So it does where there's a gap in the hedge. I'm sick of the whole thing. (*Looking at* PAMELA, *then grumpily.*) That's another new frock, Pam—that's the third this week.

PAMELA (R. *table*). Do you like it? (*Preening herself and posing to herself in front of the mirror.*) Rather rivetting, isn't it?

LADY DARNAWAY. Rather what, Pamela?

BILL. Rivettin'—it's her latest word. Don't interfere with it, it's better than the one she was usin' last week. Everything was "noony" last week.

(BENT *comes in with a dressmaker's box.*)

BENT (*to* PAMELA). This has just come for you, miss.

PAMELA (*looking at the label on the box—then in a transport of delight*). Oh—oh! (*Cutting the string and opening the box in wild haste, pulling out what looks like a couple of butterfly nets minus the sticks and the wire.*) (*Holding the gauze up.*) *Oh,* how perfectly *rivetting!* Aunt See—look!

BILL (*turning round in his chair*). Eh?

PAMELA. Bill! My Salome dress for the classical dance! and I never expected it till to-morrow morning at the earliest.

(DICK CHETWOOD *comes in.*)

DICK. Hullo, Bill, had a near squeak with the mare, haven't you?

BILL (*turning savagely*). Now, if you've bin disturbin' her——

DICK. My dear man, I do know a *little* about horses—don't excite yourself. I've just been talking to the vet—he says she'll be all right in a fortnight.

BILL (*sulkily*). 'Praps she will—but the vet don't know anythin' about it. (*Turning to* PAMELA.) Hold it up, Pam—let's have a look at it.

(PAMELA *holds up the Salome dress.*)

LADY DARNAWAY (*aghast*). Is that what you propose to perform your dance in at the entertainment to-morrow, Pamela?

PAMELA (*lost in ecstasy of admiration as she contemplates the gauze*). Isn't it simply rivetting!

DICK (*sternly*). Look here, Pamela, do you say you're going to dance in that at this show to-morrow?

PAMELA (*looking up at him with charming innocence*). Course I am.

DICK. Over what?

PAMELA. Over what? How do you mean, over what?

DICK. What dress are you going to wear underneath ?

(BENT *comes in and begins arranging the curtains.*)

PAMELA (*coming up to* DICK *with the most charming little "moue" in the world*). Oh, you dear funny old cousin Dick, what a funny old-fashioned thing you are. You see, Aunt Louisa—it's allegorical—it represent's Bach's Symphonies. (*Holding up the dress and pointing to the bodice.*) This represents his early period when he was comparatively obscure. This (*pointing to waist*) represents his middle period, and this (*pointing to rest of skirt below the waist*) represents his later period when he was perfectly transparent.

LADY DARNAWAY (*looking at dress*). It's a very clever idea, Pamela, no doubt, but I cannot help wishing that Bach's period of obscurity had continued till a somewhat later moment in his career.

(PAMELA *puts back the dress in the box, picks up the box and goes towards the door.*)

LADY DARNAWAY. Pamela, where are you going ?

PAMELA. To try it on, of course.

(PAMELA *goes out.*)

BILL (*laughing*). Very amusin'.

DICK. Awfully funny, I must say.

BILL (*laughing*). Go and light the fire in Miss Pamela's bedroom at once, Bent, will yer.

(BENT *goes out.*)

DICK. Get the thing away from her, Aunt Selina.

LADY DARNAWAY. My dear Dick, it's as much as my life's worth to attempt such a thing, I assure you. Pamela flies in such passions if you cross her. Her temper's less under control than ever, it's really most serious. (*Crosses to table.*)

DICK. Then *you* must stop this, Bill.

BILL. I stop it ! Why should I stop it ?

DICK. Well, you're engaged to Pam, or as good as engaged to her.

BILL (*starting up out of his chair*). Engaged to her! Who the deuce said I was engaged to her?

DICK. Pam thinks so certainly.

LADY DARNAWAY. I'm sure I hope so, Bill, from the way you treat her.

(FREDA SAVELL *is seen outside the big glass doors. She is a charming-looking girl of* 26. *She stands in front of the window outside. She is looking up and talking to* PAMELA *who is supposed to be at her bedroom window.*)

FREDA (*outside but plainly visible to the spectators through the glass doors*). Pam, darling—what?

BILL. I just say this——

DICK. That'll do. (*Going to the door.*) There's Freda outside.

BILL (*as* DICK *opens the door.*) Freda be hanged. (*Sits.*)

FREDA (*still outside and talking up at the window*). Yes—such a lovely walk—what—changing what? But that's the fourth time you've changed your frock to-day—yes—well, be quick then.

(FREDA *comes in, followed by* BENT.)

DICK (*kissing her fondly*). Well, dearest—had a jolly walk?

FREDA (*impulsively*). Oh, Dick, we've had such a glorious sight of the hounds. Jack and I were just coming out of the copse above Canby Hollow, and there was the fox sneaking along under the poplars, poor thing, simply dead beat, and he'd scarcely got out of the field before we heard them all coming. They caught the poor fox in the very next field.

BILL. "Caught the poor fox!" What did they catch him with—a butterfly net?

DICK (*angrily*). Look here——

BILL. Why don't you teach her to use the lan-

guage about huntin' that every one else uses?—It's only affectation talkin' like that.

FREDA (*smiling*). You missed the best run of the year, Bill—where were you ?

DICK (*anxiously—to* FREDA). Sh—sh !

(BILL *gets up out of his chair and scowls at* FREDA *savagely for a minute.*)

BILL (*doggedly*). To resume where we left off a minute ago, if any of you go spreadin' it about that Pamela and me are engaged to be married—well, you've only got yourselves to thank—that's all. (*Looking at* FREDA.) Freda started the yarn.

DICK. That's quite untrue, Bill; but if you're not engaged to Pam and don't intend to be, you're behaving badly, that's all. You said when you came back you were going to marry. Only this morning we were discussing your settling down at Braxton, and when I spoke as I did I naturally thought——

BILL (*breaking in on him*). If you mean that unless I marry Pam you're not goin' to let me have Braxton —well, you're playin' it pretty low down, Dick, that's all I can say. I suppose you know if any one does, don't cher. Why I've been toilin' and slavin' and puttin' by every penny I could get hold of all these years. I've never had another thought in my head except gettin' Braxton as my own, and you know it. I know I've been thunderin' lucky to make the money I have. But I don't want the money, I want the place—I want Braxton. I offered to buy it of yer out and out, you wouldn't do that, you know I've sworn I'd go there ever since I was eight years old, but, mark yer, if you're goin' to try and force my hand and push me into a marriage that——

DICK. I shouldn't dream of making any such condition and you know that too. I've promised to make Braxton over to you and so I shall very shortly, provided you behave like a sensible man.

BILL. Whether I marry or not you mean ?

DICK. Certainly, as long as you behave yourself.

BILL. Behave myself ! I tell you what, Dick, you and me were good enough pals before you got engaged. It's Freda's put these notions into your head, and you're playing the hand wrong, Freda, if you only knew it.

FREDA (*standing up and facing him too, then, after eyeing him first for a moment*). I want to speak to you, Bill, a moment, if you don't mind.

(*She looks at the others, who make a movement towards the door.*)

BILL (*to* FREDA). Bosh ! what on earth can you have to say to me that the others can't hear ! You're always wantin' to speak to people alone. It's a trick you got on your travels.

DICK (*sternly*). That'll do, Bill, I shan't stand it much longer.

BILL. She shouldn't rile me then, she knows I've lamed the mare.

FREDA. Indeed, Bill, I know nothing of the sort.

BILL. Well, you saw me leadin' her.

FREDA. I wasn't thinking of either you or her at the moment. There are other things in the world of some importance besides dogs and horses.

BILL. What is it then ? For goodness' sake let's have it.

FREDA. Certainly, if you'd sooner the others heard it, it's entirely your own affair. Pinfold gave me notice last night.

BILL. Pinfold—who's Pinfold ?

FREDA. Don't be silly—you know perfectly well—my maid. She said you tried to kiss her last night. (FREDA *looks at him, her eyes flashing.*)

BILL. Tried to—tried to—here—— (*Striding across the room, to the others.*) Go out, go out a minute. (*Crosses* R.)

FREDA. Yes. A minute—will you, please ?

(*The others go out.*)

(FREDA *and* BILL *settle down to have it out.*)

BILL. Pinfold said I tried to kiss her last night, did she ?

FREDA. Yes. I don't want to quarrel, Bill. I know she's a little minx—I don't pretend to trust her altogether, and I'll take your word for it, yes or no.

BILL (*looking in front of him*). Quite untrue, my dear Freda.

FREDA. Thank you. (*She goes towards the door.*)

BILL. Here, wait. What's the girl's name ?

FREDA (*coming back*). Nonsense, I'm not going to tell you again.

BILL. Why the deuce should I remember the little slut's name. However, it don't matter. Well, then you can just hear the facts, they'll do you good. (*Speaking with a pause between each word and emphasizing each word by a tap with his fingers on the table.*) Your maid gave you notice because she said I kissed her, well, the real reason why she's goin' is because I kissed—well, never mind—one of the other maids. That's what upset Pinfold. She don't like me changin' partners.

FREDA (*clenching her fist*). How dare you speak to me like that—oh, you——

BILL. Wait. You've just happened to take me on, my girl, this afternoon when I'm in a mood to give you a bit of my mind.

(*She makes a movement towards the door.*)

You'd better call in your darlin' Dick, if you're afraid I'm goin' to say anythin' to upset yer.

(FREDA *comes back and sits down.*)

When was it you and Pam came here—eh ? Well—never mind, it don't matter. I kissed your precious Pinfold the second day you came, and I'll tell you

why. I kissed her because the dog died. (*He pauses.* FREDA *does not speak.*) Well ?

FREDA. I'm exceptionally stupid, Bill, but I see no connexion between the two events.

BILL. My dear Freda, you're as stoopid as an owl. There was Pinfold sobbin' and cryin' and bellerin' about the place. I'd done my best for the dog. I sat up all night with 'im.

FREDA. You were very kind about Punch.

BILL. Well, he was gone, poor little beggar, and the only thing left for me to do was to pacify the girl. That was an awful crime I suppose, and now she comes to you last night and says, I *tried* to kiss 'er, tried to. I'd finished and done with 'er a week ago.

FREDA (*in an even voice*). Yes, it was very deceitful of Pinfold—I've listened to what you had to say——

BILL. Oh, I ain't half done yet.

FREDA. No, but before you go on, just listen to me for a moment. You've deliberately made love to Pam and she's desperately hard hit ; she's head over ears in love with you.

BILL. Bosh ! (*Crosses to table.*)

FREDA. I know it seems funny.

BILL. Thank'ee. There's women bin in love with me before now.

FREDA. Yes, what sort of women ?

BILL. The ones that like a master, there's lots about. My dear Freda, you're always on the high horse. Pam's as nice a little girl as ever lived. She's bin in love twice since I've bin back from Buenos Ayres, by all accounts. That ain't very long, is it ?

FREDA (*springing up and coming towards him*). Bill, I *won't* believe you're such a beast as you're trying to make yourself out—I *won't* believe it. The first day I was here when you were so good to Punch I thought how awfully nice you were, and—— (*coming up to him and putting her hands on his shoulders*) Oh, Bill, you're *not* like this, you're *not* like this, *don't*

say it. (*She turns away, seeing no response.*) *Don't* say it—Bill, don't, don't say it. I—— (*She breaks off, sobbing.*)

(*There is a pause.* BILL *throws himself into a chair heavily, and sits staring in front of him.*)

BILL (*in a dull voice*). *I* dunno.

FREDA (*still sobbing*). Bill.

BILL. Women are jolly queer cattle. They never listen to reason.

FREDA (*eagerly*). Yes, yes, *I will. I will,* I'll listen to anything. (*Takes chair and sits.*)

BILL. Well, listen then. Fifteen years ago I went out to Buenos Ayres without a bob in me pocket. I was a religious young cove. You wouldn't think it, but I was. You didn't know the old people, you see. We were brought up to believe in things. If you'd told my old mother that Jonah didn't live three days and nights in the whale's belly, she'd have had a fit. See that chair, that's where my old dad used to sit every Sunday afternoon and give us our Scripture lesson, two hours of it, and if you couldn't answer the questions afterwards he took you into the other room and laid the huntin' crop across yer. That was the way we were brought up. They were all bosh in your opinion, I know.

FREDA. I never said that, Bill.

BILL. You said somethin' uncommon like it.

FREDA. I only said that when religion was taught to children as it was taught to you and Dick, as something quite apart from conduct, it was useless. And so it is. You're a good enough example of that, from what you've told me yourself of your life abroad. You seem to have pretty soon dropped every kind of principle, religious or anything else.

BILL. I took the ways of the country as I found 'em and fell into 'em. I've made money and managed men. I don't say everything I've done 'ud go on to the biograph at the Polytechnic. I've had more

than one bullet through me over one woman and another. I suppose if you knew everything I'd done——

FREDA (*shuddering*). I hope I shall never do that.

BILL (*studying her grimly*). Look here—I like you, Freda, and it's precious lucky for you I do if you knew it. You'll find that out some day. (*He pauses, hesitating for a moment.*) Do you know, I believe you'd sooner know everything that I'd done than that I knew everything that you'd done.

FREDA. What do you mean ?

BILL. Nothin'. (*Looking at her keenly.*) Nothin', eh ?

FREDA. I've had troubles, Bill, but I've never done anything in my life to be ashamed of.

BILL (*looking at her closely*). You're a good plucked 'un, Freda—shake hands—I ain't like you, you see, I don't pretend I haven't done things. (*Crosses to fireplace.*) I've put one or two fellers out of the world, for one thing. You'd call that murderin', but it ain't. No more murderin' than old Dick's job out in the Boer War, not a bit. If public war's justifiable, so's private war a great deal more justifiable. The men I put out would have put me out if they could.

FREDA. I daresay.

BILL (*chuckling grimly*). Thank'ee. I had me own standards out abroad and I kept to 'em more or less. (*Changing his tone suddenly to one of intense earnestness.*) But I tell you, Freda, all the time out there I had at the back of my mind the notion that when I'd made enough money I could come back here and take up my life as I'd left it. I thought of myself comin' back and believin' in things and marryin' and bein' a churchwarden or somethin', and what did I find when I did come back, what did I find ?

FREDA. Oh, the whole country's changed, of course. I don't deny it.

BILL. Yes, and it's you who've changed it. You —the women—it ain't the men—and you're one of

the regular new lot, Freda. Dick wrote to me six months ago to say he was in love with you, and I took some pains to find out somethin' about yer.

FREDA. Did you ?

BILL. Yes, I've read your essays on free thinkin'—for one thing.

FREDA. That book was written a long time ago, Bill—I wish I'd never written it.

BILL. That's what most people wish I hope when they write books—but you did write it, you see.

FREDA. It's utterly unfair to say it's on free thinking, it's the grossest libel, it was an attempt to reconcile old things with new.

BILL. It's against religion. (*Crosses to table.*)

FREDA. No, no, not in the way you mean.

BILL. Look here, do you believe in miracles ?

FREDA. I tell you the book was written years ago when I was very young and very, very miserable.

BILL. What do you believe in now then ?

FREDA. Bill, how can a man like you have the face to cross-question me as to my beliefs ?

BILL. Yes, you don't like it, but you've bin lecturin' me, so you can just hear what I've got to say in answer. You see, you're runnin' the whole show here. Dick's so in love with you he sits lookin' at you like a stuffed goose. Pam's entirely under your influence. You've shaped her life accordin' to those essays.

FREDA (*excitedly*). I haven't. I haven't. (*Rising.*)

BILL. I don't say you've done it consciously, but you've done it. If I'd come back and found things as I'd left 'em, I'd have toed the line and married, but now I shan't do anythin' of the kind. Why should I settle down and keep the commandments—none of you keep 'em, do yer ? Sunday's the great day in the country now for playin' bridge and motorin' ; you were playing bridge the Sunday before last in this room. You, Freda Savell—sittin' in my old dad's chair and laughin' at Pam whenever she said word to rhyme

with her own name, and when I said it was against my principles to play you thought that uncommon amusin'.

FREDA. What I thought amusing was your saying you had principles.

BILL. Exactly. You sit in judgment on me. You've emancipated yourselves, you women—you think you can choose which commandments are to be kept and which ain't, but if you break the 4th Commandment in the drawin' room, why shouldn't I break the 7th in the kitchen. I don't say I have mind yer, but why shouldn't I—one commandment ain't more sacred than another, is it? You've cut the ground from under your feet, you new women.

FREDA (*angrily*). I'm not a new woman, how dare you call me a new woman?

BILL. You're all new women—all the whole lot of yer. There ain't one in the whole country side left like my old mother. It's gone, that kind of thing. You don't go to church. But, look here, Freda, what's honour amongst men, or chastity amongst women, it's simply the product of Christianity. You women have secured your position through Christianity, and now you think you can chuck Christianity and keep your position. Where are the women in Turkey or Japan? Either in harems or the places where the other sort are kept. You'll get back to the same sort of places pretty quick if you throw over the system that's put you where you are.

FREDA. Isn't there a proverb somewhere about the devil preaching?

BILL. Mine are better sermons than you preach to Pam, anyway. When I started makin' love to Pam I meant to marry her. She'd only marry to get more freedom as you call it—freedom—pah!

(BILL *crosses* R. *Sits in chair.*)

FREDA. Listen, Bill. A great deal of what you say is true—I won't deny it. When I wrote that

book I was horribly miserable and I did think that a great deal we were brought up upon was worn out and useless. You don't know what my life has been——

BILL. Don't I—p'raps I do.

FREDA. No. Nobody knows. But now—well—I'm in love with Dick. Oh, Bill, love changes everything—when a woman's in love—and poor little Pam, she is so *desperately* in love with you and you've got it all in you really to be a good fellow and settle down and be happy as you say—Bill——

BILL. Look here, you're very fond of Pam, ain't yer ?

FREDA. Fond of her ! I'm devoted to her in the sort of way that only one woman can be devoted to another.

BILL (*grinning*). How's that ?

FREDA. As dumb creatures are devoted to their young. As a lioness is devoted to her cubs. It's an instinct men know nothing whatever about and never will know. (*Looking at him fixedly.*) I'd kill any one who injured Pam.

BILL (*smiling grimly*). Yet you're always quarrellin', you and Pam.

FREDA. Because we've both got very hot tempers. That's nothing——

BILL. Well, if you're so fond of her as all that, why do you want her to marry a chap like me.

FREDA. Because she's desperately in love with you.

BILL. She's told you that, has she ? (*Rises.*)

FREDA. No, Bill, you're quite wrong. She's never breathed a word of it. (*Crosses to fireplace.*)

BILL. You're thunderin' clever, Freda, of course—but if she hasn't told you I don't know what right you've got to say so, I'm sure.

FREDA. Then I'll tell you—it was the day of the Silbury meet that I found it out, when you nearly sacrificed your life by stopping that pair of runaway

horses and saved poor old Lady Gordon's life. I can't think of it now without my heart beginning to thump. If I hadn't held on tight to Pam she'd have bolted after you. Ever since then—I've known how it was. Bill, you don't know what women are—when something stirs them like that she'd follow you like a little dog barefooted over the world. She's the sort who'd be happy with a husband like you—a master—and I know you, Bill; if you married you'd give up thinking of any one but your wife. There have been tame Chetwoods and wild Chetwoods, but they've all been the same—when they've once married and settled down. (*Crosses* R.C.)

BILL. Not with Pam, Freda, no; if she was to marry now she'd look on it as you've encouraged her to look on it, simply as an extra chance of gettin' 'er own way. Emancipation of the sex, as you talk of in your book—all right, you go on with it—but not through marryin' me, thank'ee. To get Pam to do what a man wanted, it would be no good to marry her. (*Crosses to table.*)

FREDA. What do you mean, Bill; what do you mean by saying that?

BILL. Nothin', only with girls like her, they're more likely to do as they're told when they ain't sure a man belongs to 'em body and soul.

FREDA (*coming to him and putting her hand on his arm*). Bill, I know you're fond of her.

BILL. Yes—I am—I don't deny it.

FREDA. You *must* do as I wish—you *shall*. You're not going to break her heart—Bill——

BILL (*doggedly*). You see, it's your fault partly that things have come to grief. That's why you don't like it—well, I must go and change.

(*He goes out.*)

(FREDA *sits down with her elbows on her knees and her face between her hands, staring in front of her. There is a pause. In a moment the door opens softly*

and PAMELA *steals in noiselessly. She has wrapped herself up in a long ulster, wearing it peignoir fashion, i.e. her arms not through the sleeves. Her feet are bare, her hair is dressed Salome fashion. She steals softly up to* FREDA *who is quite unconscious of her presence, noiselessly she slides the ulster to the ground and appears in her "Maude Allan" costume.*)

PAMELA. Freda.

(FREDA *starts and looks up. She gets up and stands rigid, drawing her breath quickly.*)

Well, what do you think of it? Rather rivetting.

FREDA (*her breath coming quickly*). Yes. (*She comes close to her.*) Turn round, let me see how it looks at the back.

PAMELA (*coming quite close and turning round*). Well, what do you think?

(*Losing control of herself* FREDA *suddenly gives her a resounding slap as hard as she can on the naked shoulder.*)

FREDA. That's what I think. Go—go and take it off—go—go——

PAMELA (*turning round and facing her, quivering with passion*). You beast, Freda. How dare you. (*Between her teeth.*) I shall wear it to-morrow.

FREDA. Pam, I lost my temper, I didn't mean to—— (*She comes up to her.*)

PAMELA. Don't touch me. Don't come near me.

FREDA. Oh, Pam, how could you put such a thing on, how *could* you? Anybody might have seen you—any of the men.

PAMELA (*picking her ulster up and throwing it over herself. Still in the white heat of passion*). What on earth do you mean?

(JACK CARSTAIRS, *a boy of* 9, *comes in quietly, unobserved by the two girls.*)

Who are you to go on at me like this ? You've done everything you can think of yourself and now you start suddenly being strait-laced with me. What is there against the dress, everybody's wearing them just now. People do anything they like nowadays, everybody does, nobody cares about anything, or believe in anything—it's you who've taught me not to believe in things——

FREDA (*in a low voice*). Don't say such horribly cruel things to me, Pam. You'll only be sorry afterwards.

PAMELA. Yes—you have. Bill says you have. Why should *you* be the only person who's to blow hot and cold with the same breath ? (*She goes out, slamming the door.*)

(JACK *has stood quietly watching this scene.* FREDA *sits down at the table and scrubs at her eyes silently with her knuckles.*)

JACK (*coming up to her*). What is it, Cousin Freda, what's the matter, what's Pam in such a temper about ?

FREDA. It's nothing, Jack darling, it's all right.

JACK (*climbing up into her lap and putting his arms round her neck*). Don't cry, we were so happy out for a walk.

(FREDA *is still wiping her eyes.*)

Mrs. Collins says women never ought to cry.

FREDA. When did she tell you that, darling ?

JACK. I heard her telling Lady Darnaway. She says it spoils their complexions.

FREDA. I've lost my complexion long ago, Jack dear, I'm afraid.

JACK (*looking at her cheek*). What *is* a complexion? Just skin, isn't it ?

FREDA. Well, it ought to be.

(DICK *comes in.*)

JACK (*taking a horribly filthy handkerchief out of his pocket*). Haven't you got a handkerchief—there—— (*He wipes her eyes.*) Cousin Freda, do you know how much I love you ?

FREDA. How much, darling ?

JACK. Shall I whisper it ? (*He whispers in her ear.*) There, you don't love *me* as much as that.

FREDA. Oh yes, I do.

JACK. How much do you ?

FREDA. Better than all the world.

JACK. Better than Dick ?

FREDA. Yes, better than Dick.

DICK. Eh ?

JACK (*turning*). Hullo ! There *now* you know.

DICK (*laughing*). Bent's found your guinea-pig, Jack.

JACK (*jumping down*). By Jove, has she ? Where ?

DICK. Under the sink.

JACK (*going to the door*). Chuck 'er up, and I shall just jolly well put my guinea-pig in Pam's bed to-night. Fancy getting in those rotten tempers. If I got in a temper like that at school I should get the stick.

(*He goes out.*)

DICK. What's Pam been saying ?

FREDA. Oh, I don't know. (*Throwing her arms round his neck.*) Oh, Dick, I'm so dreadfully miserable.

DICK. Nonsense, what is there to be miserable about ?

FREDA. Oh, Pam's been so awful, we both lost our tempers and it all came out. She says I've taught her to disbelieve in things, and I haven't, I haven't, you don't think so, Dick. Don't say you think so.

DICK. Pam's a silly little goose.

FREDA. Dick, answer me, tell me do you think so ?

DICK. Of course I don't—but——

FREDA. What ?

DICK. You used to talk rather freely about religion and things till just lately.

FREDA. Till when ?

DICK. Oh, I don't know.

FREDA. Shall I tell you ? Dick, there's something that sweeps all that right out of a woman's heart. All the philosophy, all the science, all the evolution of the sexes is gone—I think of quite other things now.

DICK. What do you think of, my sweetheart ?

FREDA. Silence, the air, the whispering of the summer wind across the meadows on a June evening —things like that, things one can never tire of— Dick——

DICK. Well ?

FREDA. When you asked me to marry you, I wanted to tell you everything, didn't I ?

DICK. I know, darling—but——

FREDA. All that's happened to me—I offered to, didn't I ? And now—I would—now—if you——

DICK. I tell you, Freda, when you get morbid and nervous and jumpy like this I simply can't stand it. What's the past ? What do I care about that ? I don't care what you've done. Good Lord—it's the future we've got to think of, dearest—the glorious future—straight in front of us.

FREDA. Somebody says the future simply is the past entered by another gate.

DICK. There you go again. Look here, Freda, if Pam upsets you again like this—I'll——

(BILL *rushes in.*)

BILL. Confound it, Dick, where are the servants ; why the deuce do you let everybody go out like this ? Look here. (*He hands him a telegram.*)

DICK (*looking at telegram*). Good Lord !

FREDA. What's the matter ?

BILL. What's the matter, why my manager at

Dioz has hooked it, with everything he can lay his hands on. I must go to the London office at once. Where's the motor?

DICK. The chauffeur's about somewhere.

FREDA. I'll find him, Bill.

BILL. Do, Freda, as quick as you can.

(FREDA *goes out.*)

BILL. I shall have to start for America to-morrow.

DICK. How can you start to-morrow? The boats only run once a week.

BILL. I've looked it all out, I tell you. (*Holding up the telegram.*) This is cabled from Paris, d'you see? They want to see me at the Paris office to-morrow, and there's a steamer goes from Marseilles two days after, I shall do it easy. Infernal nuisance though. Dick, old man, can't we settle about the transfer of this Braxton property before I go?

DICK. My dear fellow, the lawyers are seeing to it now. I'll come up to London with you and see them at once and get the whole thing put through. I'll get Finch to dine with me to-night and we'll settle everything.

BILL. Thanks awfully. We'll motor up now, they're waitin' for me at the London office, and I'll come back here this evenin' and pack up my things.

(FREDA *comes back, followed by* LADY DARNAWAY.)

FREDA. The car'll be ready in a couple of minutes.

BILL. Thanks. Don't say a word to Pam. I shall be back by seven o'clock.

(DICK *and* BILL *go out.*)

LADY DARNAWAY. What's the matter?

FREDA. His manager in Dioz has bolted. He's got to go out there.

LADY DARNAWAY. Perhaps that's not a bad thing either as matters stand. (*Holding up the Salome dress.*) Freda, I managed to get this out of Pam's

room without her knowing. Did you see her dressed up in it?

FREDA. If you can use such a word—yes.

(FREDA *takes the Salome dress and turns it over.*)

LADY DARNAWAY. You've more influence with her than anybody. You *must* stop her wearing it to-morrow.

FREDA. She's in a fury with me.

LADY DARNAWAY. No, not now. She was crying in her room and said she was awfully sorry for something she'd said to you.

(PAMELA *comes in in her ordinary frock.*)

You know I really don't know what the country's coming to—I——

PAMELA. Freda.

FREDA. What is it, Pam?

(LADY DARNAWAY *goes out.*)

PAMELA. I'm awfully sorry—but you'd no business to slap me.

FREDA. Oh, Pam, I'd give anything—anything in the world to undo any harm I've ever done you.

PAMELA. I didn't mean what I said, Freda, really I didn't.

FREDA. Ah, but there's some truth in it, and if you only knew what I feel about it all—I owe everything to you. If it hadn't been for you I should never have met Dick.

PAMELA. That's only chance.

FREDA. I know, but it doesn't alter it and all those days you nursed me and wouldn't leave me when I was so desperately ill, and now that I've got everything I want and I'm so happy—if I've done anything to spoil your happiness——

PAMELA. Don't be such a stupid, silly old thing. You know, Freda, your engagement has made you—shall I tell you?

FREDA. What?

PAMELA (*goes to table*). Well, rather mawkish—getting engaged does sometimes. I've noticed it with people. Now you've got it into your head that that dress I'm going to dance in to-morrow isn't quite nice, but you don't realize that we're going to have a dim light, a sort of religious light with incense and things—and——

FREDA (*waxing hot again*). You're mad, Pam, clean out of your mind. (*Picking up the dress which* PAMELA *has not noticed before.*) D'you mean to say you could put this on and stand up before—you a girl who has been brought up as——

PAMELA (*rushing forward*). Give it me. (*Stamping her foot.*) Freda—it's mine—give it me. How dare you steal it out of my room! I——

FREDA (*pushing her off*). I shan't give it you. I'm going to burn it, you ought to be whipped.

(PAMELA *attempts to close with* FREDA *to snatch the dress and succeeds in tearing a piece off.* FREDA, *in spite of* PAMELA'S *struggles, moves towards the fire. Panting as they fight over it.*)

PAMELA. If you do! if you do!

(*They fight it out, but* FREDA *being the stronger gets the dress into the fire, and puts her foot on it. The flame starts up.*)

(PAMELA, *seeing it's all over, ceases struggling and stands livid with passion.*)

PAMELA. All right—I know you—I know what you've done—that time you were ill and gave me your keys to get those things out of your despatch box—I saw—I read some of those letters. I'll tell Dick—I'll tell everybody.

(FREDA *seizes her by the wrists. The two stand quivering, looking at each other.*)

FREDA. What will you tell?

(*There is a pause.* FREDA *is still staring into* PAMELA'S *eyes, but her grip relaxes, then she lets go and her hands drop by her side.* PAMELA'S *lip begins to quiver, then she breaks down as the fit of passion passes. She throws herself sobbing on the floor, clasping her arms round* FREDA'S *skirts.*)

PAMELA. Oh, I won't tell—I won't, I won't. I'll never tell a soul. I never will. I swear it. Oh, Freda—say you forgive me—Freda——

QUICK CURTAIN.

ACT II

(*The evening of the same day—the Scene is* PAMELA'S *bedroom: in the back wall there is a window. The two side walls each have a door, the one in the left hand wall facing the spectators, leading into the passage, the other in the right hand wall leading to a dressing-room adjoining the bedroom. A Scene Plot will be found at the end of the play. As the Scene opens* BENT *comes in by the passage door, makes up the fire and draws the curtains, etc. The room is in a terrible mess, strewn about with* PAMELA'S *clothes.* BENT *tidies away one or two things, takes a dressing-gown out of the cupboard and goes into the dressing-room. In a moment* JACK CARSTAIRS *pokes his head through the passage door. He is in his night-shirt and his feet are bare, in one hand he is carrying his guinea-pig wrapped up in his under-vest. He looks stealthily round, untucks the bed at the bottom, unwinds the guinea-pig, strokes it and kisses it a moment and then puts it in the bed and tucks up the bed at the bottom again. Just as he has finished this* BENT *comes in, shutting the door between the dressing-room and the bedroom after her. She stands for a moment in mute indignation, watching* JACK.)

BENT. Well, I never.

JACK. Hullo, Benty.

BENT. Now what are you doing in here at this time of night, Master Jack?

JACK. Doing? Only come to say good-night. Where's Pamela?

BENT. Where's Miss Pamela. Never you mind where's Miss Pamela.

JACK. Is she in the dressing-room there? (*pointing to the dressing-room*).

BENT. Never you mind, Master Jack!

JACK. I bet she is then. Is Jessie with her?

BENT. Jessie's gone to bed with a sick headache, and you run along now, trapesin' about these draughty passages with not a stitch on you hardly. Do you know it's after 11 o'clock? Run along at once, or I shall go straight and tell her ladyship.

JACK (*shaking his head with an air of conviction*). Oh no, you won't.

BENT (*picking up some of* PAMELA'S *things which are strewn about the room*). Indeed I shall then, Master Jack, so just you mind what I say.

JACK. Then you'll be a sneak, that's all.

BENT (*busy tidying up*). That won't make no difference to me being a sneak, as you call it. So that I can promise you.

JACK. Won't it, then? I'll bet you it will—Sneaky old Benty. That's what you'd be called all your life—I wouldn't be a beastly sneak anyhow.

BENT. Now are you going, Master Jack?

JACK. How long will Pamela be then?

BENT. Gracious me, I don't know. Half an hour I dessay.

JACK. She's bin making a jolly good mess in here—what's she chucked all her clothes about the room like this for?

BENT. Very well, I shall go straight for her ladyship then.

JACK. Good-night, Benty. You ain't a bad old sort. Give us a kiss, old Benty.

BENT (*kissing him*). We shall 'ave you in bed to-morrow with one of them bad colds on your chest, see if we don't.

JACK. I say, who did you walk home from church with last Sunday, eh, Benty?

BENT. Will you be off now?

JACK. You'd better be careful, you know. He's Jessie's young man.

BENT. 'Ow dare you put such stories about, 'oo's Jessie's young man?

JACK. Why, Johnson, the new chauffeur. (*Coming up to her.*) Benty, shall I tell you something? He's going to take Jessie out in the motor to-night.

BENT. It's a downright good whipping you want, Master Jack, and nothing else, that's what it is, spreading such wicked false'oods, I can't think 'ow you dare to do it.

JACK. Well, he's going to take some one out.

BENT. Of course he is, you silly little boy, he's going to take Mr. Bill to London.

JACK. Yes, but there's going to be some one else besides him and Mr. Bill in the car though, 'cos when I was in the kitchen just now, Johnson came in and said he wanted the hot-water bottles filled for the motor to-night.

BENT. Such rubbish, why shouldn't Mr. Bill want the hot-water bottles, I should like to know?

JACK. Oh, I say, that's good—that's ripping, fancy old Bill wanting hot-water bottles. I tell you what, p'raps Mr. Bill's going to take Jessie out with him to South America as housekeeper. He rather likes her, you know.

BENT. Now just you 'ark to me, Master Jack, if I 'ear another word of it I shall go straight and tell 'er ladyship, that I shall, spreadin' about such wicked falsehoods. I never 'eard tell of anythink like it in all my life.

JACK. Very well. I just shan't tell you anything again, that's all. I'll bet you a shilling they're going to take somebody with them in the motor to London to-night, anyhow—Mr. Bill and your young man are, and that somebody isn't a man either, because Johnson put her ladyship's old fur motor coat in. I saw him do it.

BENT (*stamping her foot*). Now are you going to bed?

JACK. Course I am. And if you sneak I shall jolly well tell Johnson you got me into a row.

(BENT *goes into the dressing-room as* JACK *pretends to go out; in a second* JACK *comes in again, climbs on a chair, makes a "Booby trap" with his cardboard box of flour over the top of the passage door by which he has come in. He then hides under the bed.* PAMELA *comes in from the dressing-room, followed by* BENT. PAMELA *has taken off her dress and is in her petticoat and stays—evening stockings and shoes, her hair has not been touched since she had it done for dinner.* BENT *offers her her dressing-gown, holding it for her to put it on.*)

PAMELA. Never mind that. Go and tell Jessie she must come *down* at once, Bent.

BENT. She's in bed, miss, I 'aven't left 'er five minutes.

PAMELA (*very cross*). What on earth's the matter with her? She was perfectly well after dinner.

BENT. It was Miss Freda sent her to bed, miss. Shall I brush your hair?

PAMELA. No. It's simply sickening——

BENT. Can I do anything else for you, miss?

PAMELA. No, thank you.

BENT. Good-night, miss.

PAMELA. Good-night.

(BENT *goes to dressing-room door and goes out.*)

(PAMELA *left alone, pulls a small kit-bag out of the wardrobe and begins stuffing one thing after another into it with feverish haste. Suddenly she stops, listens—shoves the bag back into the wardrobe, shuts the door, pulls off her shoes and stockings, huddles on her nightdress over her stays and petticoat, lets down her hair and sits in front of the glass as if she was doing her hair preparatory to getting into bed.*)

(LADY DARNAWAY *comes in.*)

LADY DARNAWAY. Pamela, really, do you know what the time is? And what on earth's all this dreadful mess?

PAMELA. I don't know. Jack's been making hay here, I suppose.

LADY DARNAWAY. Nonsense, I said good-night to Jack an hour ago. There's something very unscrupulous, Pamela, in your always putting everything on to that child. If all children were as obedient as Jack——

PAMELA. When does a girl stop being a child, Aunt See?

LADY DARNAWAY. When she stops behaving like one, my dear. The first thing the specialist insisted upon when I took you to him last week was that you should go to bed early. Do you know what would have happened to me, Pamela, if I had been deliberately disobedient time after time at your age?

PAMELA. Yes, I know perfectly well. You've told me so very many times, you dear Aunt See. (*Getting up and still twisting up her hair.*) Do you know, I do think it was such a mistake to bring up children as you were brought up.

LADY DARNAWAY. Indeed, Pamela, and why do you think it was a mistake?

PAMELA. It was so very unsuccessful. Of course naturally elderly people can't see it for themselves.

LADY DARNAWAY. Thank you, Pamela.

PAMELA. Oh, of course, I don't mean you; however you'd been brought up you'd have been a perfect old dear—everybody says so.

LADY DARNAWAY. It's very sweet of you, Pamela, to take such a lenient view of my particular case.

PAMELA. No, no, I'm not prejudiced, Aunt See, really it *is* so. If ever I'd obeyed anybody, it would certainly have been you—you're just the exception that proves the rule. Of course I don't mean to say you're not trying sometimes, we all *must* have our

moods. Nobody can help that, can they? But, taken as a whole, well *I* don't hope to be any nicer than you at your age—I don't, really. Most elderly people are so *very* trying, aren't they? So fidgetty—so critical, and so *very* borné. (*Kissing her fondly.*) Good-night, you dear old Aunt See; whatever I do you'll always love me, won't you? (*She goes off to get into bed.*)

LADY DARNAWAY. Pamela, have you forgotten your prayers?

PAMELA. I'm going to say them in bed. It's perfectly all right, I asked the specialist about it.

LADY DARNAWAY. Asked the specialist about your prayers!

PAMELA (*sitting up in bed*). Yes, when you were out of the room. I said as I was so delicate might I say them in bed sometimes, and he said there was no objection so long as I didn't lie on my left side. Now you must really go, dear, or you'll never get any sleep at all.

LADY DARNAWAY (*coming and kissing her*). Good-night, you naughty child, I don't know why we're all so fond of you. Oh, there was one thing I wanted to ask you, Pamela. What was Lord Strelland saying to you this evening?

PAMELA. I don't know. When?

LADY DARNAWAY. When he came back, just before dinner.

PAMELA. I don't know in the least.

LADY DARNAWAY. But I saw him talking to you.

PAMELA. Yes, but I took jolly good care not to listen though.

LADY DARNAWAY. What do you think of Lord Strelland, Pamela?

PAMELA. I never think of people like that. It only gives you indigestion.

LADY DARNAWAY. You don't like him?

PAMELA. Well, if you ask me, I think he's the most rancid person I ever met.

LADY DARNAWAY. The most what?

PAMELA. Rancid—putrescent. I hate people who give themselves airs. What did he come poking about down here again to-night for?

LADY DARNAWAY. He wanted to see Freda. I told him she was out and probably couldn't see her till Sunday, and he was so rude. "Please tell Miss Savell," he said, "I will call to-morrow morning and would she make a point of being in, as it's a matter of the greatest importance." Of course I shall tell Freda, but I don't see why I should bother her to-night.

PAMELA. I should think not indeed. Why should his concerns come before everything? Good-night, you darling Aunt See.

LADY DARNAWAY. Good-night, dearest. And oh, Pamela, I've just brought you this. Now I shall leave it on the mantelpiece. (*She takes an envelope from the book she has in her hand.*) Don't look at it to-night, you are not in the mood for it, it's only a few words, but if you added them to what you say in the morning, I'm sure it might be helpful. Will you, Pam, as a special favour to me?

PAMELA. Of course I will.

(LADY DARNAWAY *sticks the envelope on the mantelpiece, and goes to the door.*)

I'll turn out the light.

(LADY DARNAWAY *goes out.*)

(PAMELA *leaps out of bed with a faint scream.*)

Oh!

JACK (*appears from under the bed*). Hullo—did he get you?

PAMELA. You horrible child, what is it? What have you put in my bed?

JACK (*putting his hand in under the bed-clothes and securing the guinea-pig*). Wait a sec—all right—I've

got him. Scored off you that time, Pammy, for once anyhow—did he get you, I say?

PAMELA. You sickening child, go out of my room at once.

(*Going to the door with his guinea-pig, he takes the envelope off the mantelpiece.*)

JACK. Hullo, what's this? (*Reading.*) "From all our evil passions, good Lord, deliver us." By George, I shouldn't care to have had that written about me anyhow.

(JACK *goes out.*)

(PAMELA *left alone jumps out of bed again, pulls the kit-bag out of the cupboard, throws in one or two more things, lugs off her nightdress, bundles it in on the top. Switches off the light, lights a candle and sets it in the window, pulls on her stockings and begins rummaging about the room—rushing and switching on the light again.*)

PAMELA. Where *is* Jessie?

(*Finding a pair of lace-up boots in the corner she pulls them on and laces them up in hot haste, then she pulls on her walking-skirt. As she is fastening it she stops suddenly and listens.*)

Freda!

(*She switches off the light quickly, jumps into bed again in her clothes and boots, pulling the bed-clothes well round her and snuggling down.*)

(*In a moment the door opens and* FREDA *comes in.* FREDA *stands for a second looking at the figure in the bed, then she switches on the light again and stands watching* PAMELA, *who is snoring audibly.*)

FREDA. Pam!

(PAMELA *continues to snore, overdoing it now, and giving herself hopelessly away.* FREDA *goes nearer.*)

(*Louder.*) Pam! (*Coming close up to her and putting her hand on her shoulder and shaking her gently.*) Pam, dear.

(PAMELA *gives as impressive an imitation as she can of a person awaking from a deep sleep.*)

PAMELA. What is it? What's the matter?

FREDA. Pam!

PAMELA (*rubbing her eyes*). Yes.

FREDA. I wanted to speak to you for a minute.

PAMELA. You're always wanting to speak to people. Yes—what is it?

(*In one hand* FREDA *is carrying her despatch box. It is an oblong leather box twelve inches by six or thereabouts, and four or five inches deep. She holds it by a leather strap fixed across the top.*)

FREDA (*standing by the table*). You remember what you said this afternoon, I want you to look at these letters.

(FREDA *puts the box on the table and opens it.*)

PAMELA. I'm horribly sleepy, won't it do to-morrow?

FREDA. No. I want you to tell me which of the letters it was you saw.

PAMELA. I didn't see any of them, Freda, really.

FREDA. Come.

PAMELA. Well, anyhow, I can't do it to-night. I'm dog tired, and I simply must go to sleep. You're always going on at me for not going to bed early. You told me you were dead sleepy yourself, when I said good-night to you just now.

FREDA. Where have you been since?

PAMELA. Only to the kitchen to get something to eat.

FREDA. You said you were going straight to bed.

PAMELA. Yes, and you said you were, too. You said you couldn't keep your eyes open.

FREDA. I dozed off in my chair and then when I roused myself and began to think about bed I was so desperately wide awake, I put on my cloak and went for a stroll in the garden.

PAMELA. How romantic.

FREDA. Yes. I was looking up at your window. I saw you put that candle there.

PAMELA. Indeed. How amusing, you'd never guess what I was doing.

FREDA. No. When you pull up the blind any one outside can see almost everything that's going on in the room.

PAMELA. Look here, Freda, I don't want to turn you out. You happen to be extremely talkative and wakeful to-night, but I'm not. The doctor ordered me to go to bed early. Aunt See's just been jawing me because I'm so late, so that if you can't take the hint——

FREDA (*sharply*). Come, come, don't be stupid, get up.

PAMELA. Get up. You must be out of your senses, Freda ; why on earth should I get up at this time of night ?

FREDA. Well, for one thing, I want you to tell me about those letters. You can't expect me to go to bed and sleep after what you said this afternoon.

PAMELA. There's nothing to tell. And if there was I can't possibly do it now. It's downright cruel of you, Freda, to come and persecute me in the middle of the night like this, when you know how delicate I am, and what the doctor has said and everything.

FREDA (*coming up to the bed and putting her hand on the bed clothes*). You're not going to get up ?

PAMELA. Go out of my room at once, Freda, do you hear me ? It's my bedroom.

(FREDA, *in spite of* PAMELA'S *struggle, pulls her out of bed.* PAMELA *gets up. The two stand looking*

at each other, PAMELA *furious,* FREDA *eyeing her calmly.*)

PAMELA. I tell you what, I shan't stand this any longer. I'm simply bullied and badgered and hunted about in this house from morning till night. I shall write to Aunt Charlotte to-morrow and ask her if I can't come and stay with her for a bit. I was just getting into bed when Aunt See came and lectured me, and then when she'd gone I just picked up my Bible a minute to read a few Psalms like I always do before getting into bed 'cos I promised Aunt Charlotte, and then I thought I heard Aunt See coming along the passage again, so I jumped into bed like this to avoid another fuss, and now you come in and keep me talking till any hour of the night.

FREDA. Yes. It's horribly late, as you say.

PAMELA. Jessie's gone to bed. I've no one to help me, or I should have finished ages ago.

FREDA. Very well. I'll help you, Pam—we'll leave the letters to-night—they can wait. Where's your nightdress ?

PAMELA. No thanks, I'll undress myself, I shall be much quicker. You don't know where my things are or anything.

FREDA. Oh, I can find them. (*She goes to the wardrobe.*)

PAMELA. Leave my things alone. (*Stamping her foot.*) Freda——

(FREDA *opens the wardrobe door, pulls out the kit-bag and extracts* PAMELA'S *nightdress from it.*)

FREDA. It's dreadfully crumpled I'm afraid.

PAMELA (*stamping her foot*). That *beast* Jessie, if she'd——

FREDA. It isn't the faintest use your going on like this, Pam, is it ? It was I who sent Jessie to bed. You shouldn't have let her into your plans.

PAMELA. Little beast.

FREDA. Where do you propose to go to-night?

PAMELA. That's my business, I'm twenty-one. I can do exactly as I please. It's nothing to do with any one except myself.

FREDA. Yes, Pam, it has to do with me.

PAMELA. It hasn't—it hasn't, I tell you. I've no mother—I'm quite alone, with no one to advise me. I've got to manage my own life and I'm going to do it my own way.

FREDA. You mean that you and Bill are going away to-night without being married?

PAMELA. I never said anything of the kind, and I refuse to be cross-questioned. I'm my own mistress.

FREDA. Pam, I talked to Bill this afternoon. I told him that we all thought you and he were engaged. Do you know what he said?

PAMELA (*bursting out now that further fighting is useless*). Yes, yes—I know—I know—we had a talk directly he came back before dinner. (*Throwing herself into* FREDA'S *arms.*) Oh, Freda, I love him—I love him—I love him. You don't know how I love him.

FREDA (*soothing her*). Yes, I do, darling. I do know.

PAMELA. We're not going to do anything wrong—we were meant for each other. I shall make him love me. You know what Bill is, what you said to me yourself about him, if once he really gave himself to any one he'd stick to them.

FREDA. I said that if once he *married* any one he'd stick to them—yes, I believe that.

PAMELA. And this is going to be exactly the same, exactly. It isn't as if we were going to live in some English country parish—on the ranch out there—it——

FREDA. It's madness, Pam, sheer madness to go on like that—nobody knows it better than you do.

PAMELA. I don't know it then. I've argued it

out and questioned myself, and I'm perfectly certain that I'm doing what's right.

FREDA. Right?

PAMELA. Yes, I shall prove to him the stuff I'm made of. He doesn't think I can stick to it, but he doesn't know one side of me. Things are absolutely different out there—there are no conventions—there's no society. We shall live a regular gipsy life, and I shall love it. I shall show him what I am, and when I've done that—when I've proved to him I'm not just an empty-headed little flirt—that I can live the sort of life he wants his wife to live—you know what Bill is, as well as I do. He'll simply come on his knees and beg me to marry him and we shall come back and settle down at Braxton. It's all as plain, if you'd only see it—— (*Crosses to fireplace.*)

FREDA. Pam, darling, will you listen to me just a second.

PAMELA. Well.

FREDA. Ever since the world began people have tried to do what you are going to do now.

PAMELA. Yes. And heaps of times it's been a success.

FREDA. Not with women like ourselves, Pam—never—never—not with a girl who comes of the stock that you do, who's been brought up as you have. There are generations, centuries behind you that you know nothing about, but they are as much part of you as the skin on your body. If you think you can tear yourself in two and throw half of yourself away, and then live on happy with the other half, the crippled shameful vestige of what you are at this minute—you're utterly mistaken.

PAMELA. I've thought it all out most carefully, I tell you. I'm not acting on the spur of the moment, I've argued it all out over and over again.

FREDA. Yes, there are no arguments in the world so plausible as those used by lunatics. You

think you're thoroughly alert, that you're weighing everything in your own mind quite naturally—but you're dreaming. You're simply in a nightmare, you're just plunging about in a prison of grotesque shadows where everything's a hideous topsy-turvy. You'll wake up when it's too late, you'll wake and see it all just as I see it.

PAMELA. Freda, you know as well as I do that there are plenty who've done as I'm doing, and been perfectly happy afterwards.

FREDA. There may have been some who haven't the capability of feeling sufficiently deeply to be miserable, but they're not like you, Pam. Wake up from your sleep and you'll hear the voice—the voice in the garden in the cool of the day—and you'll hide yourself!

PAMELA (*rises*). It's no use throwing texts at my head. It's ludicrous to expect me to listen to them—from you of all people.

FREDA. It isn't a text. It's simply a truth that lies at the bottom of everything which holds society together. And even if it was a text, Pam, why shouldn't you listen to it. You talked about your Bible just now, you always used to read it.

PAMELA. Do you read yours?

FREDA. Yes, I do. I've gone back to the New Testament. (*Goes up stage.*)

PAMELA. Of course you have; and if I was in love with Dick I should have gone back to the New Testament; but as I'm in love with Bill I've got to go back to the Old. That's just it, and we shall be Old Testament people and live an Old Testament life, like Abraham and Hagar and heaps of the others. You see you're going to marry and settle down comfortably in a country parish, and count the peaches on the wall and all that. Things haven't gone so well for me, and I'm just going to make up my mind to take what I can get, I know I can make Bill happy.

FREDA. Make him happy. (*Comes down.*) Rubbish! No matter how much a man like that tries —if you do this—he won't be able to help despising and hating you—yes, hating you for having let him do it. I know Bill a great deal better than you do.

PAMELA. Indeed you don't.

FREDA. I do, Pam. It's impossible for a girl who hasn't had the experience to know anything about men like Bill. Men like him divide women into two classes, the one you're in now and the one you're going to put yourself in in a few minutes. And when such men have anything to do with women of that class all the very lowest dregs that have ever been churned together to poison humanity are suddenly quickened to life in them.

PAMELA. I don't understand you.

FREDA. No—you don't want to understand.

PAMELA. Oh yes I do. I don't pretend that I may not be foolish—that remains to be proved, but I can't for the life of me see that I'm doing anything wrong.

FREDA (*goes* R.). Because you're blind for the moment. That's all.

PAMELA (*comes* C.). No, Freda, it's you who are blind. Think of it for a moment rationally, how in the name of fortune can some words, said in church—or not even necessarily in church according to you—it's just a few words, spoken by some old butcher or baker who's been made a magistrate or registrar or something, that's going to make all the difference between right and wrong, happiness and misery, pride and shame and everything else. It's sheer nonsense, it's just one of those old superstitions that I've heard you attack over and over again till you got engaged to Dick.

FREDA. That's what you imply, is it?

PAMELA. Imply, what do you mean?

FREDA. It's through things I've said that you feel like this.

PAMELA. I didn't say that—but——

FREDA. Do you say it, Pam?

PAMELA. Well——

FREDA. Do you?—do you?

PAMELA. Yes—I do—there. You didn't mean it—but you've done it. And now you think you can turn round and snatch it all away—but I tell you you can't. I daresay it will turn out as you say and end in misery. But if Bill goes off now without me—that's misery enough I suppose. I don't see how anything could be worse than that. I believe it will all come right (*getting her jacket and putting it on*), and I'm going to chance it.

FREDA. No, you're not.

PAMELA. Who's going to stop me?

FREDA. I am—and I will.

PAMELA. You think you can stop a man like Bill, do you, when he's made up his mind.

FREDA. We shall see.

PAMELA. You'd better let it alone, Freda, I think.

FREDA. Yes—but I'm not going to let it alone. Especially after what you've just said.

PAMELA. Then you'll interfere at your own risk, that's all I can say.

FREDA. I'm not in the least afraid of Bill, Pamela, if that's what you mean.

PAMELA. Oh no, I know—but—well—he knows things—he's found out something.

FREDA. You mean you've told him something that you saw in some of those letters there, I suppose.

PAMELA. No, no, I haven't—I swear to you I haven't. I don't know anything—I happened to glance at something and I only saw something about—a secret. When I was in a passion this afternoon it came out. But I know nothing—— Only—Bill knows something. I'm certain he does from what he's said to me. And there is something—something you don't want to get about.

FREDA. Yes, there is something, and if Bill knows it, that's all the more reason why I should stop him doing this.

PAMELA. If you do—if you try to come between us—Freda—I'm going—it's all settled—kiss me and wish me good luck. Come, let's part friends.

FREDA (*getting between her and the door*). No, Pam.

PAMELA. I'm going I tell you, let me go; he's waiting.

(*She attempts to push past.* BILL *comes in.*)

BILL. Here, where are yer? (*Turning to* FREDA.) 'Ullo, puttin' your finger in the pie again. (*To* PAMELA.) I've bin waitin' this ten minutes.

PAMELA. It's Freda who's kept me. I'm quite ready.

BILL. Come on then. Good-bye, Freda. Sorry we shan't be here for the weddin'.

FREDA. Wait a minute, Bill. I've something to say before you go, you'd better hear it.

BILL. You've always got somethin' to say. (*Picking up* PAMELA'S *bag and preparing to go.*) You spend your life havin' somethin' to say as far as I can make out.

FREDA (*very quietly*). I can quite understand your being afraid to give me five minutes under the circumstances.

BILL (*turning savagely on her*). Afraid. It won't be me that's afraid. Go out, Pam.

FREDA (*to* PAMELA). Wait in my room, Pam. (PAMELA *goes out.* FREDA *sits down at the table, her despatch box is at her right hand. There is a considerable pause.* BILL *remains standing.*) Won't you sit down, Bill. You always shuffle about so when you're uncomfortable.

(BILL *sits at the little table opposite her.*)

You've settled to take Pam with you to Paris to-night and then on to South America.

BILL. Well——

FREDA. You're just going out together as friends. That's the scheme, isn't it?

BILL. I don't know why I should explain the position to you exactly.

FREDA. No. It's very inconvenient. Even the man who has lived the life you have has got some shame left.

BILL. That's how you look at it?

FREDA. How do you look at it, Bill? How else can anybody look at it?

BILL (*he pauses a moment and then speaks earnestly*). I'll tell yer: I don't want to quarrel with yer, Freda—I always liked yer, and I always shall—and I'd much sooner part friends—I've come across a good many women one way and another, but there's precious few can play out a game of bluff like you. I ain't goin' to marry Pam because from my point of view it 'ud be a mistake. If it hadn't been for this upset over my business out at Dioz I should have gone off to Scotland to-morrow and let the whole thing alone, but everything's come together to force me hand. I've bin' absolutely straight with Pam—you know that.

FREDA. I understand what you mean—yes.

BILL. And I'm fonder of her than ever I thought I could be of any woman. If all of you, and you, Freda, in particular—if you hadn't tried to force me into it, I'd have married her, if she'd wanted it.

FREDA. You know well enough how much she wants it.

BILL (*coming down with his fist on the table*). And I say I should have done it. If I'd bin' let alone. But by God, Freda, not you nor Dick nor heaven nor hell, nor anythin' else, is goin' to push me in where I don't choose to go. It's your fault, not

mine. Yours and the old lady's and Dick's—a parcel of old women together playin' up this match-makin' business that no woman can let alone, I suppose.

FREDA. You can't get away from it like that, Bill.

BILL. Oh yes I can. It's you who've made the girl crazy like this, stuffin' her head with a lot of nonsense. It's nothin' I've done. You admitted that, this afternoon——

FREDA. That isn't the point now, though.

BILL. Ain't it. I think it is then. It seems to me the whole point. She said if I went off without her she'd do away with herself, and now you're tryin' to make a penny novelette out of the business, but as we've arranged it it's nothin' of the sort. Out there, on the ranch, things are absolutely different to what they are here. We're right away in the wilds, hundreds of miles from a railway station. It's an absolutely primitive life.

FREDA. I know—Pam's been telling me—we needn't go into that.

BILL. And if she settles down to it—and—and——

FREDA. Whose place is she going to fill?

BILL. Eh?

FREDA. How many others have you treated in this sort of way? No, Bill, you can't do it—she's different—you know in your own heart it's bound to end in some hopeless catastrophe.

BILL. Upon me word—I don't see it, Freda—why should it?

FREDA. Why, because you're not the sort of man ever to marry a girl who's once consented to be treated like this. From the minute you'd done it you'd begin to hate her and hate yourself too. If you'd only give yourself 24 hours to think it over, you'd see it as I do. It's just as you say—you've been rushed. You pride yourself on being a strong man and you think you're being strong when you

say you're not going to be pushed into doing this, that or the other——

BILL. I've settled about this, if that's what you mean by bein' strong.

FREDA. Yes, but there's absolutely nothing to be strong or determined about in it. It's the most cowardly, miserable business you've ever meddled with. A girl like Pam—who——

BILL. I never suggested it, I tell you.

FREDA. Then that makes it a thousand times worse, and you know it. She's only a child, she knows nothing really whatever of what it all means, you know she doesn't—you know it—you might just as well give a baby the lighted candle that it stretches out its hand for—Bill.

BILL. Oh, confound it, I ain't goin' over all the ground again this time of night. We've made up our minds and you're simply wastin' your breath. If Pam looked on the thing as you do, I shouldn't do it—but she don't—she looks on it as you'd have looked on it before you'd got engaged.

FREDA (*passionately*). You shan't say it, Bill, you shan't say it.

BILL. But I do say it. Pam looks upon it as you've taught her to look on these things and you know it. That's why you don't like it. You've made a rod for your own back, but it ain't one for ours and we shall prove it. If she sticks to me I stick to her. We shall be married out there and come back after a bit and settle down at Braxton.

FREDA (*in a steady firm voice, looking at him*). You'll never go to Braxton, Bill, if you do this.

BILL. Shan't I? It's me own place. It was all settled this afternoon, the lawyer's dinin' with Dick at his club in London to-night and bringin' the papers, they're all signed by this time. (*As he goes to the door.*) If you think that I'm the sort to care a toss for any scandal that may get about when I come back here to settle down in me own house

and me own county—with me own wife—in all probability—well——

FREDA (*just as he gets to the door*). I rang up Dick on the telephone this evening after Jessie told me what you proposed doing. (*Rise.*) Dick will sign no papers till he's heard from me.

(*There is a pause.* BILL *stalks back and sits down, looking at her.*)

BILL. That's your card, is it ?

FREDA. Yes. That's my card.

BILL. So you're goin' to make it a Jack Pot, my girl, are yer ?

FREDA. Yes, if you like to put it that way. I'm going to make it a Jack Pot.

(*He pauses for a minute, drumming with his fingers on the chair.*)

BILL. Very well. I'm comin' in. If I don't marry Pam, you'll stop me gettin' Braxton ?

FREDA (*sit*). You certainly won't get it if you do what you've planned to-night.

BILL. Quite so—very well. (*Standing up and bending over towards her.*) Now it's my call—and I've got a royal flush. I don't want to show it, but if you insist on seein' it——

FREDA. I'm sorry, Bill, I don't follow you. You're too technical. I haven't played poker for years.

BILL. No. (*He sits down.*) You said to me this afternoon you'd never done anything in your life to be ashamed of, didn't yer ?

FREDA. Yes.

BILL. When Dick wrote to me six months ago about yer, I thought I should rather like to find out what sort of a girl you were. I went to a man in Buenos Ayres who does these jobs. He's in with people in London and Paris—in fact all over the place.

FREDA. Yes—rather an odd idea on your part, wasn't it?

BILL. I knew something before, you see. I came across a young feller out in the States three years ago who knew yer. He was one of the relief force in that expedition which was just too late to save Carstairs and his wife, he told me somethin' about another Englishman up there who was shot right at the beginnin' of the fightin'—a Captain Marston—you know who I mean.

FREDA. Yes—he was killed.

BILL. I know, but he had a brother, a Dr. Marston, a drunken blackguard of a feller. You knew him too.

FREDA. I've met him—yes.

BILL. Well, this Dr. Marston offered to sell me some information—I bought it. This boy Jack Carstairs here, who was born in that fort in the middle of the fightin' is Captain Marston's son, and you're the boy's mother, isn't that so?

FREDA. Yes—it's quite true. Well?

BILL. Well, there ain't so very much more to be said so far as I can see. I didn't want to call your attention to it, but as you've insisted on it I should rather like to know how it squares with what you said about your havin' nothin' to be ashamed of.

FREDA. You're talking as if I had never married Major Fleming.

BILL. I know you were married to him, at least if you call it bein' married when he'd got another wife livin' somewhere else.

FREDA. How could I possibly have known that?

BILL. I don't say you could have known it, but you bolted off with him, without findin' out who he was, or what he was or anything about him—I don't know whether Carstairs and his wife consented to your palmin' the boy off as their child, but it seems to me——

FREDA. Wait, Bill. You don't understand in

the least. What happened was this. The spring before all this occurred Major Fleming and I were married at a small hill station in Cashmoir.

BILL. Yes, under false names.

FREDA. Under different names—yes—because he told me that unless we kept the marriage secret he would lose the chance of an important government billet.

BILL. You believed that ?

FREDA. He showed me all sorts of letters and papers to prove it. I was only a girl of 17 at the time, he persuaded me to do it, and we started off to wander about by ourselves in the hills. We came across Ethel Carstairs and her husband about a week before this rising amongst the Afridis began. Captain Carstairs had got wind of what was going to happen and had had time to make his plans. When we'd been shut up in the fort a month Jack was born and the week after Major Fleming was shot. Ethel and her husband both knew all the while that he had got another wife living in Madras, but they daren't tell me till after the child was born. Two or three days before they were killed they told me everything and offered to adopt Jack and give him their name. I refused at first, but Ethel was determined, she's known me all my life and was devoted to me just as I am to Pam ; she said my position was hopeless and so it was. I don't suppose I could have proved I was married, and if I had it wouldn't have made much difference. The night before Ethel was killed I gave her my solemn promise I'd stick to the arrangement. The next day she and her husband were both shot just as the relief party got to the fort, Ethel's letters in which she spoke of Jack as her child were sent off to England, while I was in hospital. What was I to do ? How could I break my promise to the dead ? Why should I have broken it ? It was purely a matter between us three.

BILL. Nothin' to do with Lord Strelland, eh ?

FREDA. Why on earth should I ever have thought of Lord Strelland at that time?

BILL. You're landed now in rather a queer position.

FREDA. Yes, but I couldn't possibly have foreseen that Lord Strelland would adopt Jack.

BILL. No, but when he did you should have spoken out, shouldn't yer? That's where I should have thought you'd got somethin' to be ashamed of.

FREDA. I couldn't do it, Bill. I daresay it's impossible for a man to understand. As far as I'm concerned I should be only too thankful if Jack never saw Lord Strelland again, and I'd sooner starve than ever touch a penny of his money myself. But it isn't a question of money at all. I couldn't foresee that Lord Strelland would become so devoted to the child, and when he did how could I prevent it? When he suddenly took it into his head to make Jack his heir, I had either to let things go on as they were, or ruin my own child and myself too. I didn't care about myself, but I was not going to injure Jack just because Lord Strelland had taken it into his head to do a thing like this, and, mind you, one of his chief reasons for doing it is to spite his brother, you've got to remember that. Why should I absolutely destroy my own child's future just because a man takes it into his head to act in this way? No mother would do it. I didn't see how the secret could ever come out.

BILL. Ah, that's it—but they do come out—these things—well?

FREDA. You're going to tell Dick—that is what you mean?

BILL. Certainly not. This Dr. Marston's dead. He won't bother you any more, and you've made a very good arrangement as far as I can see. I don't blame yer. I shall never say a word about it if you don't interfere with me. You've only got to give me your word you'll telephone to Dick first

thing to-morrow and tell him to sign those papers. Pam will write you a letter to say that we were married before we sailed, and when we come back we shall be married. So there'll be no bones broken one way or the other.

FREDA. And if I don't?

BILL. Don't what?

FREDA. Don't fall in with your wishes?

(FREDA *and* BILL *are sitting opposite each other at the small bedroom table.* FREDA *stares into* BILL'S *eyes, who returns her stare. At the same time she puts her hand into the despatch box which is lying open on the table.*)

BILL. Well, what else are you goin' to do? You don't want to lose Dick, I suppose—and ruin the boy—and disgrace yourself. Upon me word, Freda, I don't see what on earth you *can* do except what I tell yer.

(*She whips a revolver out of the despatch box from under the letters and covers him with it.*)

FREDA. I can do this. Don't move, Bill—or before God I shall shoot you. Are you going to do as I wish about Pam?

BILL. Stop a minute—I won't move, I promise yer. (*Chuckling.*) You're a clinker, Freda. By George, you're toppin'—I suppose if I laugh you'll call that movin', won't yer. Look here, if you do shoot me—you'll swing for it—you know that, I suppose?

FREDA. Oh dear no, I shan't. I shall just turn this little thing the other way about, that's all. I'm much better out of it, don't you see that—men are so stupid—any woman would have seen that in a minute. If I'm gone it will be better for Dick, better for the boy, better for every one—and if I get rid of you first, it will be better for Pam.

BILL. You're goin' to shoot then if I don't cave in—eh?

FREDA. I shall count five, Bill. If you don't tell me before I've finished I shall do my best.

BILL (*chuckling*). All right. Go ahead, then—this beats cock fightin'——

(*There is a pause.*)

FREDA. One—two—three—four——

(BILL *knocks up the revolver, which goes off, missing him; he springs across the table and catches her wrist, there is another report and he staggers back, his left arm dropping, but he sticks to her with his other hand and after a tough struggle* (*he has only one arm, the other being disabled*), *he secures the revolver.* FREDA *is still struggling when loud voices are heard outside.* BILL *rushes to the door.*)

BILL (*standing against the door so as to prevent them coming in. To* FREDA.) Here wait, don't speak till I tell yer. This is a little bit of fun we've had between ourselves, you know; we ain't goin' to let the others into this little entertainment.

(*The voices grow louder. There is a banging at the door from the outside.*)

BILL (*shouting*). Come in—quick, can't yer, some of yer.

(BILL *leaves the door and rushes to the window, throwing it open.* LADY DARNAWAY *and* BENT *appear in the doorway, followed by a group of half-clad frightened domestics.*)

BILL (*excitedly at the window*). Here quick, some of you—there—look—see—there he goes.

LADY DARNAWAY. What's happened—who was it?

BILL. Who was it? How do I know. Run down and knock up the policeman one of yer, not that he'll be any good—but it's just as well.

LADY DARNAWAY. Where's Pamela?

BILL. Why, Freda saw the beggar creepin' down the passage and followed him in here and got Pam safe out while he was in the dressin' room, and then fetched me——

LADY DARNAWAY. Are you hurt, Bill?

BILL. No, nothing. Freda 'ull see to that. Good-night, old lady; good-night to yer all.

LADY DARNAWAY. But you're bleeding, Bill, I'll send for the doctor at once.

BILL. Doctor. Nonsense. It's only through the fleshy part of me arm. Good-night. You can sleep quite comfortable now. He won't come near the place again. By George, I wonder he didn't break his leg, droppin' from that winder—Freda 'ull see to my arm.

(*They go out, closing the door.*)

BILL (*to* FREDA). Here, get my coat off, will yer, and just tie this up.

(*She gets his coat off—his white shirt is covered with blood.*)

FREDA. Bill, hadn't we better send for somebody?

BILL. Nonsense. Just a flesh wound. (*As she ties up his arm.*) Freda, you're a thunderin' good plucked 'un and by George I'll marry Pam to-morrow at the registry office and go across by the night boat.

FREDA (*breaking down hopelessly and throwing her arms round his neck*). Oh, Bill—you dear old thing—you dear old Bill——

BILL. 'Ere, mind my arm.

QUICK CURTAIN.

ACT III

The next morning about lunch time. The scene is the same as in Act I. PEGLER *shews in* MRS. COLLINS. PEG *says, "Very good, Madam. I will tell her ladyship." He goes.* MRS. COLLINS, *left alone begins hovering round the table, spying about and poking into anything she can find. After quite a considerable pause* LADY DARNAWAY *comes in; watches her for a moment, and then comes forward.*)

(LADY DARNAWAY'S *manner to* MRS. COLLINS *in this scene is a mixture of rage and a desire to snub* MRS. COLLINS, *combined with a terror of her and her tongue.*)

LADY DARNAWAY. Good morning, Mrs. Collins.

MRS. COLLINS (*wheeling round and gushing full on to her*). Ah, but, my dear, this is really *too* good of you to come down and see me at this hour of day, but, as I told them, I was quite sure you wouldn't mind *my* popping in.

LADY DARNAWAY (*stonily*). I'm so glad—have you had some lunch?

MRS. COLLINS. Oh, but I shouldn't dream of wanting lunch to-day, and besides it's hardly one o'clock. If I can only be of any little help, that's all I came for, of course when they said you were out. Well, we naturally are out, aren't we, at this time of day to everybody except just our *very* intimate friends.

LADY DARNAWAY. I hope they weren't too insistent.

MRS. COLLINS. Oh, but your butler's new. I *quite* understood.

LADY DARNAWAY. I was afraid he might have been rude. I made such a particular point of none of us being in to *anybody* to-day, we are so *very* busy.

MRS. COLLINS. Now isn't that sweet of you to treat me like this, and tell me everything—and I know all about it, my dear. I was down at the laundry and Jessie came about Pamela's things. Oh, my dear, Jessie was in such a state of excitement, she told me everything, so I popped up at once to see if there was any little thing I could do.

LADY DARNAWAY. That girl wants whipping. You'll forgive me, Mrs. Collins—of course as far as you are concerned it doesn't matter—but Jessie was told particularly——

MRS. COLLINS. But that's what I said to her—"Supposing, Jessie," I said, "it had been somebody else who would have gone chattering all over the place—and, my dear, she would have told *any* body, she was in that condition—not that there's anything to *conceal*, I quite agree as Jessie said herself. "Well, ma'am, why shouldn't a lady and gentleman take it into their heads to marry on the spur of the moment so to speak, though with folks in our rank of life, ma'am, people do pass remarks and there's no denying it."

(BILL *comes in and stands for a moment scowling at* MRS. COLLINS. BILL'S *arm is in a sling.*)

LADY DARNAWAY. You seem to be on most intimate terms with Pamela's maid, Mrs. Collins.

MRS. COLLINS. Well, you see, she belongs to the G.F.S.

LADY DARNAWAY. Ah, I expect you find the G.F.S. very useful. (*Sits.*)

MRS. COLLINS. Well, if one hadn't any hobbies in the country at *all* you know, if one simply *sat.* (*Sits.*)

Of course I know it's difficult for *every* one to understand, but when you are working for a *cause*, when you are really interested as I am in a society like the G.F.S., unless you bring yourself down to the girls' level——

LADY DARNAWAY. Quite so—you find out nothing.

(BILL *goes out, after fetching something off the table.*)

MRS. COLLINS. Exactly, you don't get to know the girls—or——

LADY DARNAWAY. Or their concerns—or—any one else's.

MRS. COLLINS. Well, that's one way of looking at it, and for any one who does nothing *whatever* from one year's end to the other, I can quite understand that the idea of taking the trouble to befriend girls in Jessie's position must seem quite incomprehensible. But supposing I had been like you, my dear, now just look what I should have missed, I should have been too late to kiss dear little Pamela before she went, and wish her the very best luck, and the one chance I shall probably ever have in my life of seeing a marriage performed by Special Licence would have slipped through my fingers.

LADY DARNAWAY. Really, Mrs. Collins, but this is quite news to me.

MRS. COLLINS. I beg your pardon.

LADY DARNAWAY. I know nothing whatever about any special licence.

MRS. COLLINS. Ah, but then you get up so *very* late, don't you. Why Freda and Mr. Preston started off at cockcrow to get it. They've just come back with it. Didn't you hear the motor ? Mr. Preston's simply inflated with pride.

LADY DARNAWAY. I thought anybody could get a special licence.

MRS. COLLINS. Quite a mistake, my dear—only in novels, and it's nothing for Mr. Preston to be so

very cock-a-hoop about, as I told him, just because his uncle happened to be in with the faculty office, but as I said to Lady Strelland, if I hadn't met Jessie——

LADY DARNAWAY. Have you told Mildred Strelland ?

MRS. COLLINS. I met her outside the Lodge gates —and you know what she is—so I thought it wiser to tell her at once—and what do you suppose she said : " Oh, Mrs. Collins, how *very* odd "—just like that—" how *very* odd "—now isn't that exactly like her. But you know, my dear, the truth is, Mildred Strelland is hopelessly soured, she's never been able for one thing to get over losing her good looks.

LADY DARNAWAY (*rises*). Well, I should have thought that not even you could have pretended that Mildred Strelland wasn't still a very beautiful woman.

MRS. COLLINS. Even me. (*Rises.*) Why, my dear, but I always stick up for Mildred, that's just it. As I was saying to Mr. Preston a moment ago, if she'd only taken the thing in time.

LADY DARNAWAY. Taken ? What on earth do you mean ?

MRS. COLLINS (*coming closer*). My dear, this is entirely between ourselves—but she shaves regularly.

(BILL *and* PRESTON *come in, followed by* DICK *and* FREDA.)

That I know for a fact, because the maid she got rid of last summer told my cook, and I've found out the actual shop where she buys her razors, and it's so *silly*, as I said to Mr. Preston yesterday, if she'd only come to me or your wife, these things nowadays are so *very* easily dealt with in their initial stages—but now—well—as her maid said——

BILL (*coming forward, unable to stand it any longer, with savage rudeness*). What do you say about us, Mrs. Collins, when you get outside ?

MRS. COLLINS (*drenching him with gush*). Ah, my

dear Mr. Bill, my very heartiest congratulations—but what's the matter with your arm ?

BILL. You've got quite enough to last for to-day without my arm—good mornin'. (*Doing everything, but actually pushing* MRS. COLLINS *towards the door.*) Sorry to turn you out, but we've none of us a minute to spare——

MRS. COLLINS. Oh, but don't you think I shall be offended, Mr. Bill. I'm quite used to Colonial ways, you know—our boot-boy was actually born in the Colonies—and as I said to Lady Strelland—I shall be the very first to call on you and your wife when you come back and settle down at Braxton.

BILL. Thank 'ee. Comin' back next April.

MRS. COLLINS. Then you mark my words, whatever happens, no one shall say I gave dear little Pam the cold shoulder. I shall be the very first to come——

BILL. Quite right, after we've settled down at Braxton, we shall be out for three years—good mornin'.

(*He edges her out and slams the door.*)

LADY DARNAWAY. Bill, you simply terrify me when you are as rude as that ; she's a most dangerous woman too, when you offend her.

BILL (*between his teeth*). I'll wring her infernal neck if I catch her bletherin' about me—I've bin bothered enough this mornin' without her.

DICK (*coming forward anxiously, holding the special licence in his hand*). Now, my dear old Bill, do listen to me for one minute. Freda and Preston have been at all the trouble of getting the thing, where on earth's the objection ?

BILL (*savagely*). I tell you I've settled to do it me own way. Who's goin' to be married, Dick, me or you ?

DICK. But if you'd only tell us what you dislike in it ?

BILL. I've told yer—I took the trouble to go

down myself to the registrar's this mornin' and left a note sayin' we'd be there at two.

DICK. But you can't do it all in a minute that way, my dear fellow, you can't really. (*Holding out the licence.*) Come, come, old man, Freda's moved Heaven and earth to get this. You're quite ready, aren't you, Preston ?

PRESTON. Perfectly, perfectly.

BILL (*takes licence and looking at it gloomily*). Twenty-nine pounds five and sixpence ; well if ever I heard of such a damned waste of money.

FREDA (*coming forward eagerly*). Bill, dear, it's part of my wedding present.

BILL (*turning savagely on her*). I'll be hanged if I'll be married on charity. (*Taking a bundle of notes out of his breeches pocket and counting some out. Giving the notes to* FREDA.) There's thirty pound.

DICK. Confound it, Bill.

(LADY DARNAWAY *sits.*)

FREDA (*taking the notes—she half closes her eyes and speaks wearily*). It doesn't matter. (FREDA *puts her hand to her head, sits.*)

DICK. Is your head bad again, dearest ?

FREDA. It is a bit.

DICK. You're quite shivery. You didn't get a chill in that beastly motor ?

FREDA. No, no, Dick, really—I'm perfectly all right. I've had rather a bad night, that's all.

DICK. Dreaming again ?

FREDA. A little—yes. (*Coming up to* BILL *coaxingly.*) Bill, dear, don't be angry about it.

BILL. Well, I don't mean to be. But I knew nothing of this at all, you see I was purposely told nothing—not a word. The moment a man's goin' to be married all the women start treatin' him as if he was a baby in arms. You said yourself yesterday that the only thing for Pam was to be made to do as

she was told, and this is the start—you and Pam arrangin' this behind my back without a word to me——

FREDA (*eagerly*). No, no. (*Crosses to table.*) It was nothing to do with Pam really. It was my suggestion, my wish. I couldn't bear the notion of her being married at the registry office. You will, won't you?

BILL (*sulkily*). Very well—if she's ready. You've paid for the beastly thing, I suppose; there'll be no gettin' that back. Archbishops ain't the sort to part when they've once pouched the stuff. But you couldn't have started Pam worse, Freda. She's as extravagant as she can be already. If you'd let it alone and she'd had thirty shillingsworth at the registrar's, it would have bin——

PRESTON (*coming forward*). Now then—I think—if we're all ready. (*To* BILL.) Are you ready, Chetwood?

BILL (*sulkily*). How long will it take? (*Impatient.*)

PRESTON (*coming forward with a book in his hand*). Now, just here, look a moment. (*Pointing with his finger in the book. Shewing book.*) I'm not going to read that, or that; it will take us exactly a minute in the motor to get to the Church; we can do the whole thing and be back here in ten minutes.

BILL. Very well. Where's Pam then? (*Buttoning up his coat, impatiently.*) Come on.

LADY DARNAWAY. She's in the garden. (*Goes to window.*) I'll fetch her. (*Opening the door into the garden—calling.*) Pam—(*going out*) Pam——

DICK. She was in the library a few minutes ago. (*Opening the door and calling.*) Pam——

LADY DARNAWAY (*coming back much worried*). She was in the garden just now.

DICK (*going outside and shouting*). Pam.

LADY DARNAWAY (*coming back*). Where on earth is the child? Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear. (*Opening*

the other door and calling.) Pam ! Bent, is that you ? Bent——

(BENT *comes in.*)

Bent, do you know where Miss Pamela is ?

BENT. She's gone down to the laundry, milady.

LADY DARNAWAY (*in despair*). Well, really, upon my word——

BILL. Then I'll go down and see the registrar —I ain't goin' to stop messin' about here. I've got half a dozen things to do before startin'.

LADY DARNAWAY (*beseeching him*). Bill, just a minute. (*To* FREDA.) Ring up the laundry, my dear, and see if she's there.

(FREDA *goes to the telephone and rings up.*)

FREDA (*at telephone*). Yes. Put me on to the laundry, please. (*To* BILL, *who is going out.*) Bill.

BILL. I ain't goin' to wait here coolin' my heels, that don't fall in with my plans at all, and I ain't goin' to do it.

(*He goes out.*)

LADY DARNAWAY (*in agony*). They'll never be married—I knew it—I said so all along. Bill, one minute.

(*She goes out.*)

FREDA (*at the telephone*). Yes, Mrs. Hobbes— —yes—It's Miss Savell—yes—I want Miss Pamela —Yes—is that you, Pam—Yes—but we could have sent for the things—but you're to be married, darling—we're all waiting—yes, you awful child—now —at once. But you can't possibly—yes—now here —we've just come back with it—Very well, we'll send the motor down at once.

(*The* BUTLER *comes in.*)

BUTLER (*to* FREDA). Lord Strelland wishes to see you, miss.

DICK (*to* BUTLER *angrily*). Look here—I told you particularly that none of us were in to anybody.

BUTLER. His Lordship says it's an appointment, sir.

FREDA (*putting her hand to her head—distressed*). Very well—where is he ?

BUTLER. In the motor with Lady Strelland, miss.

FREDA. Ask him to come in.

(*The* BUTLER *goes out.*)

DICK. Beastly nuisance—what does Pam say ?

FREDA. She must get her washing shirts and then say good-bye to her pony. (*Crosses to* L.)

DICK. Look here, Preston—I'll get in the motor and go down to the laundry and you bike across to the paddock and fetch the pony up here. We won't be five minutes.

(DICK *and* PRESTON *go to the door* R., *meeting* STRELLAND *as he comes in.*)

DICK (*to* STRELLAND). Mornin', Strelland.

STRELLAND. Good morning.

(DICK *and* PRESTON *go out, leaving* FREDA *and* STRELLAND *alone.*)

(*To* FREDA.) Good morning—I'm afraid I've come at rather an inconvenient moment.

FREDA (*wearily*). Well, yes—you have rather —you got my note.

STRELLAND. I beg your pardon.

FREDA. I sent a note up early this morning asking you to wait till to-morrow.

STRELLAND. Yes——

FREDA. I should have thought you might possibly have waited, Lord Strelland, under the circumstances. I said I'd bring Jack to-morrow.

STRELLAND (*with subdued anger*). Then I'll be as brief as I can. When you've heard what I have to say, you'll understand.

FREDA (*coldly*). I hope so. (*Sits.*)

STRELLAND. I only got back from India yesterday.

FREDA. Yes—you wrote to me from Calcutta.

STRELLAND. Yes—while I was out there, Miss Savell, I visited the place where my sister was killed. It appears that about a year ago they pulled down the fort where you were all shut up, you heard of that ?

FREDA. No.

STRELLAND. They found some letters—in a box—hidden under the floor—one of the natives got hold of them somehow and kept them—when he heard who I was he brought them to me. They contain statements which affect Jack—and yourself—they were far too important to write about. Perhaps now you'll understand why I felt obliged to come and see you at the earliest possible opportunity.

(*The* BUTLER *comes in* R.)

BUTLER. Beg pardon, milord, Lady Strelland wishes to speak to you.

(BILL *comes in* L.)

STRELLAND. Hasn't the motor gone ?

BUTLER. Her ladyship's returned, milord ; she says she won't get out of the car. I was to say it was about the arrangements for to-night, milord.

STRELLAND. I shall not be a moment, Miss Savell. (*To* BILL.) Good morning, Chetwood.

BILL. Mornin'.

(STRELLAND *goes out* R.)

(*To* FREDA.) Where's my cartridge box, d'you know ?

FREDA (*staring in front of her*). Your—cartridges—I don't know.

BILL. Dick's bolted off somewhere now. I tell

you what it is, Freda, if Miss Pam don't turn up in a few minutes I shall go to London without her. I was perfectly ready to do as I promised, and I'm here to do it—but—— (*Crosses to* F., *feeling his arm and fumbling with his coat.*) Confound this bandage, it's slipped again. I wish you'd just tie it up for me, would you?

FREDA (*dazed—to* BILL, *who is trying to get his coat off.*) What is it, Bill—yes—I——

BILL (*tugging at his coat*). Just see to this, will yer?

(FREDA *comes towards him with unsteady steps—then she stops—raises her hands as if to put them to her head. Then drops them—her eyes close and she sways.* BILL *rushes forward and catches her just as she is going to fall.*)

BILL. Hullo—I've got you, it's all right, Freda. What's the matter—I've got you. (*He gets her into a chair and pulls his flask from his pocket.*) Confound this arm. (*Pouring a drop into the cup of the flask and putting it to her lips.*) Here.

(*He pours a little down her throat. Gradually she opens her eyes.*)

FREDA (*with a look of terror in her eyes*). Thanks—I shall be all right in a moment—Bill—he's found out.

BILL. What?

FREDA. Lord Strelland—when he was in India—he got hold of some letters—he's found out.

BILL. What—about you and Jack, d'you mean?

FREDA. Yes, yes. (*Wildly.*) What shall I do—what shall I do—— Bill, I knew it was coming—I knew it somehow—after what you said last night. "These things come out"—do you remember you said it. I hardly slept last night—every five minutes I kept waking—suddenly—in the middle of

such horrid dreams. I—thought I was back there —back in that dreadful place—waiting—waiting —all through those ghastly nights and days. And every time I woke—I was going through it—over and over again—I kept on trying to creep out—out on to the wall—hoping I might get shot—and twice—I saw—him. It was horrible—I thought I was in love with him again—dreams—they're so strange in that way—I kept muddling them together —him and Dick—the native soldiers—they were carrying him—into my bedroom—on the stretcher —soaked in blood—and every time I woke. The same words—sometimes it was (*rise*) you—sometimes Dick—and then I heard him say it—as if he was laughing at me—" You'll be found out—found out."

BILL. Come, come, Freda. Pull yourself together. (*Getting out his flask again.*) Here.

FREDA (*shaking her head*). No—I'm all right. (*Sits.*)

BILL. If it has come out—there's worse things happened you know, before this. You were plucky enough last night.

FREDA (*staring in front of her—in a dry voice*). Dick—Dick—— (*Wringing her hands.*) Oh, why didn't I tell him. (*Starting forward suddenly towards* CHETWOOD.) Bill—what will he do? (*Crosses to* R.)

BILL. If Strelland splits on you to Dick—I'll scragg the devil—that's all.

FREDA. That's no good—what's the good of talking like that. Bill, say something—tell me——

BILL. It's bad luck—thunderin' bad luck—after all this time.

FREDA. Yes—I must do something—I—if it had only happened a month ago—I shouldn't have cared —I was callous—but now—when it's all come back —all my old happiness—all my old faith—on purpose to have it snatched away again—that's how it seems, just as if God had planned it all to make it

more than I can bear. (*Breaking down and sobbing pitifully.*) And I've never done anything, Bill—I've never done anything wrong—it's just luck—it's just—— (*She sobs helplessly.*)

BILL (*ruminating ponderously*). It's what my old mother used to call one of the inscrutable decrees of Providence.

FREDA (*bursting out in an agony of despair*). Why upon me? Why upon me?—why upon me? I can't give Dick up, I tell you, Bill—I——

BILL. Well, I don't profess to understand it. But anyhow, Freda, look here. It's no manner of use your workin' yourself up like this, is it? If the cat's out of the bag it's out. And if Providence has chosen to work it that way, it's not a pennorth of good your puzzlin' your head about that either. You see, old girl, you say you've never done anything—but if we're goin' to argue it from that point of view—well—you did your best to shoot me and do away with yourself last night, you know. That's all outside the book of the rules as far as I remember.

FREDA. I know—I know—but——

BILL. You see, accordin' to your own account, Freda—you've bin' railin' at Providence for years and years, haven't yer?

FREDA. Oh, I know, I know—everything had gone—everything. But it's come back now—and I don't see—I don't see—— (*Turning on him wildly.*) How can you say there's any justice in it—Bill—how can you?

BILL. I dunno. How should I know. But I tell you how my old dad would have looked at it. He'd have thought it all just enough. Accordin' to his notion you've kicked over the traces for years, and now you've repented and all that and you're just like one of the village school children who's bin playin' truant. You've come back and reported yourself and now you've got to take what's waitin' for yer. (*Cross to* F.)

FREDA. No, Bill. Even a man like that wouldn't have pretended I deserved all the agony I went through as a girl.

BILL. You made your own rules as a girl, that's where he'd have had yer. You must have made your own rules, or you'd never have bolted with a chap like Marston. You were warned, you said so this mornin'.

FREDA. Bill, I know. But I was only seventeen —and now—just for that, after all this time—to be——

BILL. Stop it—don't excite yourself. You've got to see Strelland and you'd much better keep quiet. And don't you turn on Providence, Freda, just because you've always tried to make Providence fit in with some notion of what you think he ought to be—it's not a bit of use——

(BENT *comes in* R.)

BENT. We've found the box, sir.

BILL. Where is it ?

BENT. In the gun-room, sir.

(*She goes out* R.)

BILL. Now, you pull yourself together and play the hand as well as you can.

(BILL *goes out* R.)

(FREDA *is left alone for a few moments, stage business.*)

(STRELLAND *comes in.*)

STRELLAND (STRELLAND'S *manner is cold and formal*). I haven't brought the letters, Miss Savell. I made a brief abstract of the important points. I'm sure you will understand why I didn't write about it.

(*He hands her a paper, there is a pause, she looks through it.*)

I thought it would save time if you would just tell me whether there's any truth—in——

(*She folds up the paper, puts it on the table and looks at him calmly.*)

FREDA (*in an even voice*). It's not quite correct.

STRELLAND. You mean?

FREDA. It was *their* suggestion that they should take Jack.

STRELLAND. I see. Otherwise?

FREDA (*looking at him*). Yes. It's all perfectly true.

STRELLAND. I should have been told of this, don't you think?

FREDA (*in the same even voice—looking at him*). I'm sorry—yes.

STRELLAND. You see it puts me now in a position that—that——

FREDA. Does any one else—does your wife—know about it?

STRELLAND. No—no one—at present.

FREDA. What do you propose to do?

(*There is a pause. He watches her. She keeps her eyes fixed on him and moves towards the table.*)

STRELLAND. My suggestion is this. If you choose to let me have the boy altogether—not a living soul shall ever hear a word of this.

FREDA. And if not?

(STRELLAND *shrugs his shoulders and makes a gesture with his hands.*)

(*In an even tone.*) Briefly your position is this, you are going to force me to give up my child under the threat of exposing me to the man I'm going to marry.

STRELLAND. If you think for a moment, Miss Savell—I am sure you will see that putting it in that way is utterly unfair to me. Through a gross piece

of deception on your part you have allowed me for years to occupy a certain position with regard to Jack—a position which I've made public to the whole world. Now—these facts come to light, you don't attempt to deny them or palliate them in any way. I don't pretend that I've ever liked you—I never have—and I've never trusted you. You see I'm a religious man—and——

FREDA. Really! really! I mean—I didn't know.

STRELLAND. Oh, if you mean that I haven't been to church of late years—that is for reasons best known to myself—but—I—I—believe in things. I'm not like—well—like you at any rate have given yourself out to be in the past.

FREDA. Lord Strelland, that's all over—I swear to you it's all done with. I'm absolutely changed.

STRELLAND. Since?

FREDA. I—I know—it's quite lately.

STRELLAND. Since your engagement, you mean. I heard you were in church last Sunday. These emotional changes—I am sorry to say—I don't put much faith in——

FREDA. It isn't that—it isn't—it isn't emotion. Will you give me a chance—will you let things remain as they are for—a time? (*Coming towards him.*) Lord Strelland——

(*Suddenly his manner changes—he takes a swift step towards her and clutches her by the arm, staring into her face and speaking in a low voice quivering with passion.*)

STRELLAND. I want Jack—I tell you—I want him—I want him—I love him—I've no children of my own—and I've got this chance—and——

(*He drops her arm but still stands perfectly rigid—quivering and staring at her.*)

(*There is a pause. When he speaks again it is in the formal voice.*)

If you don't do this, Miss Savell—what does it mean—think—Chetwood will have to know.

FREDA. I'd chance that.

STRELLAND (*eagerly jumping on to his point*). Yes, yes. But Jack—he must be told who he is, and what he is. He's a clever child. He'd go far. He would have come into one of the best positions in this part of England—the question is—when he grows up whether, if you refuse to do as I suggest, he may not feel that you've sacrificed him at your own inclinations. I don't wish to put any unfair pressure upon you at all—but it's ridiculous not to face the circumstances, exactly as they are.

FREDA. There are your brother's children.

STRELLAND. There's a quarrel between us that can never be made up. I'm a lonely man. All this money—this enormous property, it will go to your boy—nothing's entailed—I've an absolutely free hand. You can't possibly stand in the child's way—you his mother.

FREDA (*in an even voice*). I see—very well——

STRELLAND. You—ah—think of falling in with my plans.

FREDA. I shall be able to see him sometimes ?

STRELLAND. Possibly—yes—at least—we can settle that afterwards—I really don't know—I——

FREDA. When do you propose to—to (*almost in a whisper, her lip quivering*) take him away ?

STRELLAND (*moving away and turning from her*). Well, I was thinking that he might come back with me now—for this afternoon at any rate—and—— (*He goes to the door leading into the garden, calling.*) Jack—Jack—here a moment.

(JACK'S *voice heard outside.*)

JACK (*outside, shouting at the top of his voice*). What ho—without there——

STRELLAND. Jack—here.

JACK (*appearing at the door*). Yes. (*He has his fishing-rod in his hand and holds up a fish.*) I say, look what I caught in the pond.

STRELLAND. Yes—what a beauty—your cousin wants to speak to you for a moment.

(STRELLAND *goes out into the garden, shutting the door.*)

(JACK *comes in, leaving the rod and fish outside.*)

JACK. Hullo, Cousin Freda—I say, why didn't you tell me ?

FREDA. What, dear ?

JACK. Why, about old Bill and Pam goin' to be married—I can stop for it, can't I ?

FREDA (*crosses to* R.). Stop ? I don't know.

JACK. Well, Uncle Strelland wants me to go back with him at once and stay, you know.

FREDA. Stay the night, do you mean ?

JACK. Well—longer than that—Bent's packing my things. He's got all these people coming to shoot to-morrow and he wants me to be there because the chap who's going to be my house-master at Eton's coming.

FREDA. You'll like that, won't you ?

JACK. What ?

FREDA. Going back with Lord Strelland.

JACK. Oh—I don't mind for a bit—it's a change. Do you know there's one thing's simply fearful sport at Uncle Strelland's.

FREDA. What's that, darling ?

JACK. Shouting down the ventilators—he's just had some new sort of ventilating pipes put in—cost millions—and if you climb up outside and shout down them, you simply can't think what a row it makes. You should just see Aunt Strelland when I do it.

FREDA. Do you like her, Jack ?

JACK. Aunt Strelland—oh, I don't know—she's not so bad—for a woman. Do you know, Cousin

Freda, I was thinking the other day, and I've come to the conclusion that I don't care for women very much, p'raps it's because I've never had a mother like other chaps. You're the only one I care about. (*Climbing on to her lap.*) I say, do you remember what I always used to like doing to you ?

FREDA. What ?

JACK (*taking the lobe of her ear between his finger and thumb*). Pinching the soft bit of your ear like that, don't you remember ?

FREDA. Yes, darling.

JACK. Does it hurt ?

FREDA. No.

JACK. There, does *that* hurt ? (*Suddenly noticing her eyes.*) I say, I *am* awfully sorry—I didn't think I was pinching a bit hard, really I didn't.

FREDA (*wiping her eyes with her handkerchief*). No, no, Jacky dear, it wasn't that. You see Pam's going away has made me a little unhappy; it was nothing to do with your pinching my ear, really it wasn't. If you were to pinch me twenty times as hard as that—I shouldn't mind.

JACK. Wouldn't you *really*, Cousin Freda. Not if I hurt you awfully.

FREDA. I shouldn't mind a bit—just at this minute.

JACK. Don't women mind pain ? I thought they weren't so brave as men.

FREDA (*looking at him, but not really listening for the moment*). What, darling ?

JACK. Don't women mind pain and suffering ?

FREDA. They've got to put up with it, Jacky dear, that's what they're here for.

JACK. How do you mean ?

FREDA. I can't explain it exactly. But if women began to object to suffering everything would stop.

JACK. Do you mean to say that the world would come to an end if women weren't always suffering ?

FREDA. Something like that—yes—always—every

minute of the day and night somewhere in the world there are women suffering.

JACK. But why? For something they've done wrong?

FREDA. No, no, not that.

JACK. Just to keep things going, d'you mean?

FREDA. Yes—just to keep things going.

JACK. What a funny plan. Is that what the Suffragettes are going to alter, Cousin Freda?

FREDA. Who's told you about the Suffragettes?

JACK. Oh, Aunt Strelland's always jawing about them. I say, do you know what I'm going to do when I'm grown up?

FREDA. What, dearest?

JACK. You know that farmhouse above Braxton, well it belongs to Dick, and only the old dairyman lives there—he'll be dead by that time, and I'm just going to take you there, when I'm at a public school, you know—in the summer holidays—and we'll just live there by ourselves.

FREDA. Wouldn't it be dull, Jacky, right away up there by ourselves, with nobody else at all?

JACK (*looking very knowing*). Yes—you think that—because you're engaged to Dick—but—Cousin Freda—we won't have old Dick—see—you'll have been married to him for ever so long by that time. You won't feel a bit like you do now—and—d'you know, Mrs. Collins says that if married couples gave each other a bit of a rest sometimes they'd often get on ever so much better—of course I don't mind your thinking so much about Dick now because—well—you're engaged—but you *do* love me better than Dick, so we'll just give him the slip.

FREDA. Perhaps Lord Strelland will want to take you abroad with him.

JACK. Will he?

FREDA. He's spoken of it—and—Jack—perhaps I may not be able to see you quite so much as you get older.

JACK (*in an altered voice*). What—how do you mean ?

FREDA. You may have to go away a great deal, dearest, and——

JACK (*getting off her lap. His breath beginning to catch*). You're not—tired of me—just—just because you're going to marry Dick. I always thought that very likely it 'ud—you—you—won't be like that ?

FREDA (*with difficulty*). No, no, Jacky, it's not that—it's not that.

JACK (*somewhat reassured*). It isn't, is it—because if—— (*Catching sight of something on the floor*). Hullo, there's my watch clasp, the very thing I was looking for yesterday—somebody's trod on it too. (*Putting it between his teeth and trying to bite it straight.*) Because—look here—I tell you one thing, Cousin Freda—I shall never get tired of you—I couldn't.

(JACK *during the rest of his lines here is trying to get the clasp straight and does not look up at* FREDA, *who cries silently.*)

Do you remember that time when you were so ill in London ? It was then I started it. I'll tell you—saying this at the end of my prayers—every night when I'd said—that thing you know what you always say at the end—blessallkindfriendsandrelationsmakemeagoodboyamen. I just said afterwards, " and keep Cousin Freda 'cos I love her better than anybody," and I've always said it ever since, and I don't care what you do when you're married, I shall say it just the same, always.

FREDA (*pulling herself together*). Yes, yes—Jack darling—come here—listen—it's nothing to do with my marrying Dick.

(JACK *comes to her.*)

It isn't really. It's only that Lord Strelland thinks that now you're getting older, that he ought to have you more with him in the holidays—and—he—he—may—want—to—keep you with him a great deal—almost all the time—in fact—and I can't help it—you see—I——

JACK. He can do as he likes, you mean?

FREDA. Yes. But, Jack, promise me this—you won't forget—I mean if perhaps you don't see me for a long time—you'll always remember—just to—to say—those words you said just now—always, darling, won't you? Before you go to bed—because—though I may not be near you every night when you're saying your prayers—I shall be thinking of you—and——

(BENT *comes in* R. *to* C.)

BENT. If you please, miss, is Master Jack to take his school things?

FREDA. I don't know—I——

(STRELLAND *comes in from the garden.*)

BENT (*turning to* STRELLAND). I didn't know, milord, whether you meant Master Jack to take his playbox? or whether he is to come here again before he goes back to school?

STRELLAND. Send everything, Bent, please, and, Jack, if you want to bring your fishing-rod, you'd better go and take it to pieces.

(JACK *goes out.*)

(*Turning to* FREDA.) I felt, Miss Savell, that—it was better to——

(DICK *comes in hurriedly* R.)

DICK (*rapidly*). We've run that little minx Pam to earth at last. Hullo, Strelland.

STRELLAND. How do. Sorry to rush in on you

like this, but I had a wire from Jack's future housemaster, he's coming down to-night, and I wanted the boy to meet him—and—as Miss Savell has no objection I——

(FREDA *leaping up and bursting out in a torrent of words.*)

FREDA. You shan't then—he shan't go—he shan't—he shan't. Oh, Dick! Oh, Dick!

DICK. What is it—what's the matter?

FREDA (*bursting away from him*). He's mine.

(*She snatches the paper from the table and gives it to* DICK.)

It's all there—I can't give him up—I can't do that—Dick—he's mine—I'll go—it doesn't matter—I'll go—I ought to have told you before—I don't mind going—but I can't give him up—I daresay I ought to, but——

(STRELLAND *goes out.*)

I can't do it. I——

(*She sinks on to the chair, sobbing brokenly.*)

I—can't—I can't. (*Her voice dies away in the struggle of her sobs.*)

(*There is silence for a time, except for her choking sobs.* DICK *comes quietly to her and puts his hand on her shoulder.*)

DICK (*very gently*). Freda, don't cry, darling—you mustn't cry.

FREDA. Oh! I ought to have told you—I know—I know. But I couldn't. I was so happy—I couldn't—I don't mind going, Dick—but don't think against me.

DICK (*sitting beside her*). Freda, listen. I know something about this. At least I didn't actually

know—but two months ago I suppose it was, this man, this Dr. Marston asked me to come to see him in London. It was three or four days before he died. Alcoholic poisoning they called it at the inquest—he was quite incoherent when I saw him, but he said enough to enable me to guess that there was something of this kind. Of course I wasn't engaged to you then—but——

FREDA. I tried to tell you, Dick——

DICK. I know, dear—but I'm not that sort. We're none of us like that—none of us Chetwoods. —you know the woman my grandfather married —he fell in love with her without at all knowing what she was, and when—people tried to tell him—well—he put a bullet through one of them. We're all like that. I don't care in the least what you've done. (*Smiling.*) The worse your crimes, the fonder I should be of you.

FREDA. But I don't see how you can forgive it —I mean my not telling you.

DICK (*rises*). Dearest, from my point of view there's nothing to forgive.

FREDA (*rises*). Oh, Dick, I believe the flintiest-hearted man on earth would forgive me if he knew what I'd suffered.

JACK (*rushing in in a state of wild excitement*). Dick—Dick, I say what *do* you think? They've caught the burglar.

DICK. Eh?

JACK. The man who broke into Pam's bedroom last night. (*Calling out into the garden.*) Mr. Checkley—Hi—come in—Mr. Checkley.

(CHECKLEY *follows* JACK *into the room and goes up to* FREDA.)

CHECKLEY (*to* FREDA). We've ketched 'un, miss, and we shall require you for the purposes of identification.

FREDA. What's he like, the man you've caught ?

CHECKLEY. Red-'aired man, with a snub nose, miss. You can't mistake 'im.

FREDA. Oh, then that can't possibly be him. The man I saw last night was a tall dark man with a black beard.

JACK (*dragging her out*). But they're sure it's him, Cousin Freda—come and look—he's handcuffed.

(FREDA *and* JACK *go out* R. DICK *exit* L.)

(BILL *comes in* R.C.)

BILL (*to* CHECKLEY). Here, I say, who on earth's that you've got outside there ?

CHECKLEY. We've got 'im, sir—the burglar. There, Miss Savell, she don't 'ardly remember I dessay, but you'd know 'im I warrant.

BILL. What's he like, this man ?

CHECKLEY. Red-'aired man, sir, with a snub nose.

BILL. Not the man, Checkley. The man who shot at me was a small fair-haired man with a grey moustache.

CHECKLEY. Ah, this 'eer feller 'ud look like that in the dark, I dessay.

(*A huge box with* PAMELA'S *initials is brought down into the hall.*)

If you'll come a minute, sir, I think you'll find as this is the man.

(*He meets* FREDA *at the door.*)

BILL. All right.

FREDA. It's dreadful, Bill—he's handcuffed. You *must* stop it.

(PAMELA *rushes in in great excitement,* F.R.)

PAMELA. Freda, quickly. I've been looking for you all over the place. (*Then in an agonized*

voice.) Where *is* that hat you promised to give me ?

FREDA. I'll get it, dearest.

(FREDA *goes out* L.)

(*Another huge box with* PAMELA'S *initials arrives, followed by* BENT.)

PAMELA. There's room in that one, isn't there, Bent, for another hat ?

BENT. I think so, miss.

(*A third box is carried in, followed by* LADY DARNAWAY.)

PAMELA. Oh, well, put it in there.

LADY DARNAWAY (R.). My dear child, it's not the slightest use taking all your thick winter dresses, I assure you.

PAMELA. You dear old Aunt See—you—*are* such a dear—as if I didn't know what the climate was.

LADY DARNAWAY. But, Pamela dearest, what can you do with all those frocks out on the ranch ?

PAMELA. We shall go into a town sometimes, I suppose. Anyhow I'm not going to be parted from my clothes, so that's flat.

BILL (*to* PAMELA). Aren't yer ? (*Looking at the boxes.*) What's all this ?

PAMELA. It's only just some of my clothes, Bill —I——

BILL. Open 'em. Let's see what you've got.

PAMELA. Bill, listen. I promise you I've looked up the climate in *Harmsworth's Encyclopaedia.* I'm only taking just what's suitable.

BILL. Where are your keys ?

(*She gives him the keys. He unlocks the boxes and pulls out one thing after another, throwing them broadcast about the room.*)

Here, what's all this tomfoolery ? (*Showering them out.*) Look here. (*Turning to* LADY DARNAWAY.)

When's the next jumble sale at the Rectory ? Look here, Pam—upon me word——

PAMELA (*white with passion*). How dare you, Bill —how dare you touch my things. (*Rushing at him and trying to drag him from the box.*) I will take them, I tell you—you beast, Bill—I—*will.*

BILL (*turning and gripping her by both arms above the elbow*). Stop it—d'you hear.

(*There is a pause. He looks at her, gripping her arms.*)

PAMELA (*in a frightened voice*). Bill, you're hurting.

BILL (*leading her to a chair and setting her down like a child of three*). You sit there, and if you get up before I tell yer, I shan't take yer at all, d'you hear. What's in those other boxes ?

PAMELA (*rubbing her arm where* BILL *pinched her*). Only some light summer dresses.

BILL. Both of 'em.

PAMELA. The one by the door's got my winter things in it, but—— (*Rubbing her arm.*)

BILL (*pointing to the two boxes*). Take 'em down to the Rectory.

(*The servants take one of the three boxes out.*)

PAMELA (*sniffing*). But I shan't have a rag to my back, Bill.

BILL. There's an old Indian woman 'ull make you plenty of clothes out on the ranch. (*Goes* L.)

(PAMELA *continues sniffing, but takes care to sit still.*)

(FREDA *comes in with the hat in her hand.*)

FREDA. Here it is. Why, what's the matter, Pam ?

PAMELA (*sniffing*). Nothing, darling. It's only that I feel leaving you all so dreadfully.

FREDA. Dearest ! (*She kisses her.*)

PAMELA. Can I get up, Bill?

BILL (*who is talking to* DICK). Eh?

PAMELA. Can I get up?

BILL. Yes. (*Coming up to her.*) But just you remember this, Pam, accordin' to the law out there, it's a perfectly simple matter for any man to get rid of his wife, if she can't keep her temper. I don't want to be unreasonable, but you ain't a schoolgirl —you're a married woman now—and——

FREDA (*starting forward*). What? Bill—are you?—have you?

BILL. Married Pam—yes—but if she thinks she's goin' to a country where just because a woman's married——

FREDA (*breaking in and rushing up to* PAMELA *long before* BILL *can say more than "Yes—but if"—i.e.* BILL *goes on talking simultaneously, while* FREDA *says the following line, kissing and fondling* PAMELA). Oh, Pam—Oh, Pam—dearest, dearest little Pam—but I think you might have let me know, darling, after all the trouble I've taken.

PAMELA (*sniffing and whimpering*). He—he—wouldn't wait—I was strolling quietly up here, and just as I got to the Church—they caught me, and rushed me in and bumped me down, and did it all exactly as if I was having a tooth out, and (*breaking down and sobbing bitterly*) I've left all my washing shirts on the font—and—they've tu—tu—tumbled in.

BILL (*angrily*). There was no water in it, I tell yer.

PAMELA (*angrily*). There was, Bill. You know there was, it was what that horrible little Norton baby was baptized in yesterday. Mr. Preston never changes the water, now we're so short in the village.

LADY DARNAWAY. My dear child, what dreadful nonsense.

FREDA. Never mind, don't cry, dearest.

PAMELA (*wiping her eyes*). I shall be all right in a minute. (*Whispering*). Freda, darling.

FREDA. What.

PAMELA. I—I—— (*She begins sniffing again.*)

FREDA. Tell me.

PAMELA. Oh, Freda—I——

FREDA (*very earnestly*). Tell me, dearest—if it's anything I've ever said. (*Whispering almost.*) Pam——

PAMELA. Freda (*looking round at* BILL, *who is now talking to* DICK), you ask him.

FREDA. What?

PAMELA. Whether I can't just take one or two things out of that box. I can squash them into the other box.

(*The servants come in and carry out the second box.*)

(*Beginning to sniff again.*) He's sending my boxes down to the Rectory for the Jumble Sale.

FREDA. Bill.

BILL (*turning from* DICK.) Eh?

FREDA. Can Pam just take one or two things out of that box, she can get them into her other box.

(LADY DARNAWAY *coming up to* PAMELA.)

LADY DARNAWAY. Yes, yes, my dear, I'm sure Bill will. (*Calling to the servants who are carrying out the box.*) Pritchard.

(LADY DARNAWAY *hurries out after the servants, who carry the box out.*)

BILL (*coming up to* PAMELA). Let's see what you want. I don't mean to be unreasonable, only I haven't been out there fifteen years without knowin'

———

PAMELA. But, Bill, if you'd only listen.

(*They go out, disputing vigorously.* PAMELA *in her shrill, chattering voice,* BILL *rumbling a bass accompaniment, both talking at once without listening to the other.*)

(FREDA *and* DICK *are left alone.* DICK *comes* L.)

(FREDA *begins picking up some of the things* BILL *has thrown on the floor.*)

DICK. Well, you've got your way over that anyhow. Freda, we've never settled yet what day *we're* going to be married.

(FREDA *stops picking up the clothes and puts them on a chair. She does not look at* DICK, *but stands fumbling with the ring on her finger.*)

FREDA (*in a low voice*). Dick.

(*He comes to her and puts his arms round her.*)

DICK. Well?

FREDA (*looking up at him and smiling rather pitifully*). You do want your poor old second-hand remnant of a wife? I'm only fit for a jumble sale.

DICK (*holding up his finger in front of her*). Look here. If like that I could change a single thing about you, I wouldn't do it.

FREDA. But why?

DICK. Because then you wouldn't be the girl I've settled to marry in about a fortnight. (*Bursting out.*) I tell you, Freda, if by holding up my hand like that——

FREDA (*rises, catching the hand he holds up*). Oh, Dick, how dreadfully you bite your nails.

DICK. That's because I'm worrying, dearest, at the length of our engagement. When did we get engaged?

FREDA. It will be ten days to-morrow. (*Sits.*)

DICK. And I've settled absolutely nothing, beyond getting this old thing out of the safe at the bank. (*He takes a large old-fashioned looking locket out of his pocket.*) That belonged to my mother, it's for you to wear on the day we're married. Can you read what I've had engraved inside? I ain't a literary cove, so I couldn't think of any poetry or anything, but I've always liked those words, ever since I was a kid. D'you see?

FREDA (*looking at the locket*). There?

DICK. No, no, the other side—slant it like that —there.

FREDA (*reading slowly*). I, Margaret Ethelfreda,

DICK (*reading*). Take thee, Richard,

FREDA (*reading*). To have and to hold

DICK (*reading*). From this day forward

FREDA (*reading*). For better for worse,

DICK (*reading*). For richer for poorer,

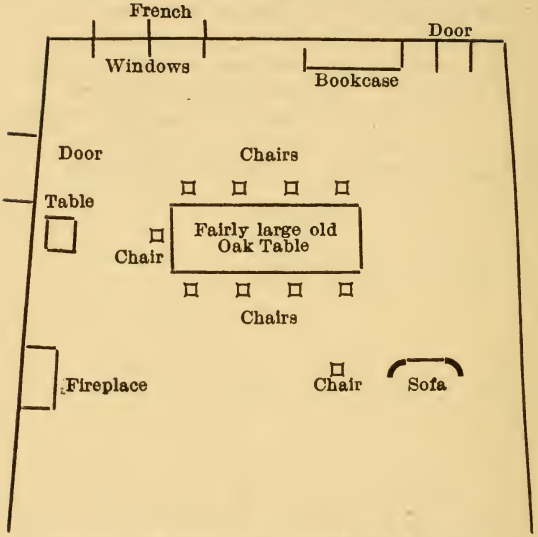
FREDA (*reading*). In sickness and in health,

DICK (*reading*). To love and to cherish,

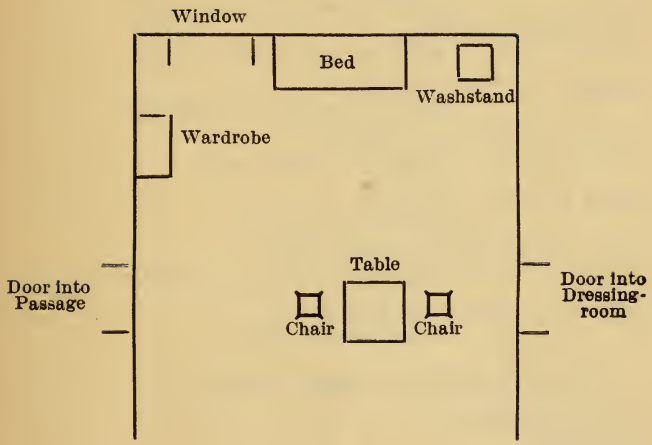
FREDA (*reading*). Till death us do part. (*Throwing her arms round him passionately.*) Oh, Dick —till death us do part. Till death us do part.

CURTAIN.

THE TRUANTS. ACTS I AND III.



Note.—The big table might be discarded in Act III.



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